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CHRISTIAN COURIER

The Easter Issue

Christ-centred. Creative. Canadian.

RESURRECTION AMONG THE RUINS

An Easter meditation on Isaiah 65:17-25. | **Brian J. Walsh**

"Christ: Swords into Plowshares" by iconographer Kelly Latimore.

Can there be resurrection
among the ruins?

Dare we imagine new life
rising from these streets of
death?

Can we join Isaiah in the ruins
of Jerusalem,
a city that never could live up to
its name,
that never was a city of shalom?
Can his alluring oracle of
resurrection
speak to us in the ruins of our
lives?

We know that it will take a lot
of doing
to see this undoing through.
We know that in the face of such
brokenness
we need nothing less than a new
heavens and a new earth.

In the ruins of our all-embracing
homelessness,
in the wake of the murder of
home,
in our own lives,
in our history,
can we be liberated
to Isaiah's imagination of
homecoming?

From the bombed-out cities of
Ukraine
to the mass murders in Sudan,
from hunger in Burkina Faso
to violence and displacement in
Myanmar,
in the ruins of Gaza,
the constant assault on the West
Bank,
can we imagine resurrection?
Under the oppressive weight of
sorrow and guilt
can joy be reborn?
Can joy and delight
be reborn in the ruins?

Yes, says the prophet,
but it all hangs on two words.

"No more."

This is a defiant hallelujah.
A hallelujah against the odds.
A hallelujah that says "yes" to
resurrection,
and "no more" to the forces of
death.

No more shall the sound of
weeping be heard.
No more shall the cry of distress
rise in the streets.
No more crying out in hunger.
No more keening over dead
children.
No more cruelty sanctioned by
the state.

No more lives cut short because
aid was refused.
No more child mortality for lack
of care.
No more young people cut down
by street violence.
No more premature death of the
elderly.

No more shall houses be built
and folks remain homeless.
No more unaffordable housing.
No more displacement.
No more refugees.

No more cheap farm labour.
No more extractive cash
cropping.
No more destructive agriculture.
No more food insecurity.

No more shall labour be in vain.
No more sweatshops.
No more exploitation.
No more unemployment.

No more children born for
calamity.
No more children raised in the
ruins.
No more children buried beneath
the rubble.
No more children sacrificed
before the gods of nation and
race.

No more.

Can we imagine such a
resurrection?

Here is an audacious vision of a
city of delight,
in which there is an end to
neglect and injustice,
an end to oppression and
violence,
in the rebirth of generosity, care
and justice.

Can we imagine a world of
creational peace?
Can we imagine a healed
ecology of radical restoration?
Can we imagine ecological grief
restored in delight?
Can we imagine this world
restored as home for all
creatures?

Not without a new heavens and
a new earth.
Not without resurrection life
overcoming death.
Not without resurrection
permeating all of creation.
And not without a resurrection
spirituality.

So there is one more "no more"
that is necessary.
One more healing, without
which the vision fails.
One more resurrection that is at
the heart of it all.
The resurrection of the Presence
in our midst.

No more silence.

"Before they will call I will
answer,
while they are yet speaking I
will hear."

A resurrection spirituality.
A God who listens.
A God who answers.
A God in the ruins.

Dare we hope for such a thing?
Dare we live in such a hope?
Dare we not?

Practice resurrection.
Among the ruins.

MAIL TO:

PM# 40009999 R9375

4 | Time to lean European?

5 | A homemade pipe organ

15 | *Deo Volente* all along

CRC LOSES LANDMARK CHURCH

Fellowship Church of Edmonton officially disaffiliates from the Christian Reformed Church of North America after 46 years. | **Jennifer Boone**

Bob Bruinsma leading the Children's story at Fellowship.

WHEN THE MOTION FOR EDMONTON'S FELLOWSHIP CHURCH'S disaffiliation from the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA) was approved at the March 8 Classis Alberta North meeting, members of Fellowship met the news with murmurs, joined hands, smiles and tears. The motion didn't take long: a unanimous vote, a farewell letter, a blessing and a prayer, and Fellowship officially separated from the denomination that nurtured it.

But the journey up to this point was a far longer one. As Fellowship attendants filed out of the meeting, their linked arms and flowing tears spoke of a denominational commitment spanning 46 years.

Roy Berkenbosch's letter on behalf of the congregation expressed both sadness at the situation and confidence in Fellowship's future, while ending with a note that they are leaving not in anger but on their own terms.

Fellowship has always been an anomaly within the denomination, Berkenbosch said, referring to its traditions of lay-led leadership, a lack of paid staff positions, and weekly, open-table communion. While unique to the CRC, these characteristics are indicative of the original mission planted by Fellowship's founding members in 1979.

Jim Visser fondly remembers those early days, when he attended household meetings to dream of an inclusive space of worship. "Eventually I said, 'It's time to start a church,'" Visser recalls with a smile. "A church that would be lay-led and inclusive."

And so began the congregation whose sanctuary is nestled in The King's University. While its disaffiliation occurs in the midst of the CRCNA's Human Sexuality Report (HSR), issues around sexuality are only the tipping point of what has been four and a half decades of advocating for inclusion within the denomination.

BEARING WITNESS

Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning, King's faculty and active member of Fellowship, recalls the aftermath of the CRCNA's 2022 synodical stance on human sexuality. Fellowship had been discussing gender and sexuality for years before the HSR, and had already developed an inclusion statement. He says that it quickly became clear that there would be no "gray area in terms of participation for a church like Fellowship."

"Disaffiliation became apparent quite early in this whole process," Visser says, echoing Nicolai-deKoning, "but we felt that we had to do it as a witness, and a challenge."

In the 1990s, this same desire to be a witness is what fueled Fellowship to lead the charge on women in ministry.

Dolores Huizinga, Edith Sinnema and Jenny Visser played key roles in this piece of Fellowship's history. Huizinga was the first woman to sit as an elder at Classis Alberta North, while Visser was the first to represent as a deacon. Sinnema, developing her passion for pottery at the time, crafted a clay bird with a broken wing to serve as a metaphor for the absence of women in ministry. On its broken wings, the bird flew to the Grand Rapids Synod, where advocates for women in ministry took turns holding it during the meeting.

"Without the women," Sinnema explains, "it's like a bird with a broken wing – the church cannot fly and cannot work as we are meant to."

Now, 35 years later, as the CRCNA grapples with a different aspect of inclusion, she and Huizinga believe the metaphor applies to the LGBTQ+ community; without their presence, the church is not whole.

But Fellowship does not only want Classis to think about the LGBTQ+ community; in his farewell address, Berkenbosch asked Classis to think of the children.

"Did you weigh the kids?" he asked. "The ones you have baptized . . . and upon whom you have declared the promises of God's unshakeable love. The children are watching."

From representations of flightless birds to exhortations to remember the children, Fellowship is what one member, Alice Joosse, calls a "conscientious objector" to the CRCNA's synodical decisions over the years.

An anomaly, a conscientious objector, or maybe the right phrase is "safe place."

When Jamie Hurlburt first attended Fellowship, a pride flag on the welcome table extended a welcome invitation. "It told me I was safe to show up as myself," they say. And when they came out as trans to their Anglican church a few years ago, the general response was "Blessings on your journey." Hurlburt echoes this affirmation with a sentiment of their own: "I believe that I'm following God's path for my life by embracing my trans identity."

Blessings on your journey. What could the CRC learn from these four simple yet encouraging words?

Bob and Louisa Bruinsma, longtime members of Fellowship, believe there's a general need to rethink the relationship between local churches and the broader denomination. For Louisa, the CRC has aligned itself with a business of "structuring our denomination top down and tightening the screws" so that it is a rigid hierarchy.

"I think denominationalism has sometimes been a kind of an idolatry," Bob says, "where people define the church of Christ almost entirely within the scope of their own denomination."

As Fellowship looks ahead, some members think it might become a church that welcomes people leaving other churches. Although alliance with another denomination or with a Canadian CRC are both possibilities on the table, Fellowship seems to prefer the idea of focusing inward for the near future, to spend time on healing.

Roy Berkenbosch.

WHAT'S GOING ON IN ALBERTA?

Christian Courier is working hard to keep track of the rapidly changing landscape of CRC churches in Canada – specifically regarding disaffiliation. Of the 45 congregations in Alberta's two classes, I was able to get information on 28 congregations about their future plans.

1. Sticking with the CRCNA

19 churches are more likely to stay with the CRC than to disaffiliate. One pastor says that although their church is remaining with the denomination, they grieve the loss of those who do leave: "We are less without them. We do hold to a traditional view of sexuality, but we also want to be a church that is open to welcoming and embracing people no matter what struggles they face or questions they have." Of that group, 8 say they are too small to split.

2. Strongly considering disaffiliation

Three churches are more likely to leave than to stay or are already slowly disaffiliating. Two churches have passed the first disaffiliation vote.

3. Already gone

Two churches have already disaffiliated, including Fellowship in Edmonton. Emmanuel in Calgary had a split vote, with 50% leaving to form a new, non-CRC church called The Table.

4. Too soon to know

Four churches don't know yet. Discussions are ongoing, and it is too early in the conversation to make a definitive decision.

See page 7 for how Alberta compares to Canadian responses overall.

Jenna Boone

Jenna, CC's Digital Editor, is working towards a Bachelor of Arts degree in Environmental Studies with a focus in English from the King's University in Edmonton.

THE ALBERTA REFORMED NETWORK

New community gives Christian Reformed churches – disaffiliating or not – a place to belong. | **Cheryl Mahaffy**

Roy's Place.

WANDER INTO ROY'S PLACE, a restaurant in the southern Alberta town of Claresholm, and you might find an informal gathering of Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) leaders, some from hours away, deep in conversation. For the past few years, they've been convening here periodically, drawn not only by the food but by a desire for the honest, respectful, regenerating dialogue they say they no longer experience within the denomination's official governing bodies, Synod and Classis.

As churches across the denomination wrestle with the implications of decisions by Synod 2024 to require adherence to a particular interpretation of scripture, including sexuality, that informal gathering has spread northward and morphed into a provincewide effort called the Alberta Reformed Network.

"After Synod's decision in 2024, it became really clear that anyone who had disagreement, whether that be on human sexuality, on infant baptism, on anything deemed confessional, wouldn't have a voice," says Paul Verhoef, University of Calgary chaplain and a member of River Park Church in Calgary, whose markedly diverse congregation has taken steps toward leaving the denomination as a result. "For many churches the seriousness ratcheted up. That was the occasion for what has become a bit more of a formal though still very informal group."

Individuals from more than 10 Alberta CRCNA churches began gathering, in person and virtually, to share their experiences and imagine what a provincial network might become. They hail from a spectrum of churches – congregations that are seeing shifts in membership or leaving the denomination as well as those who desire to remain. Network contacts Paul Verhoef and Dale Melenberg illustrate that breadth. While the church Verhoef attends contemplates leaving, Melenberg's congregation, The River Community Church in Edmonton, intends to remain in the CRCNA as long as possible despite embracing "boundless inclusivity" as a core value. In Melenberg's words, "We're hoping to focus on the mission God calls us to do rather than that which separates us."

Those involved in the fledgling Alberta Reformed Network have now developed a one-page "launching pad" and begun inviting churches and others with shared history in the Christian Reformed Church to consider coming aboard. Their invitation, headlined "God is doing a new thing in Alberta. Do you want to join in?", describes the network's intent to be a safe space that "glorifies God through unity without uniformity and diversity without division." A gathering that is Christ-centred, locally focused, connected and temporary – "navigating current challenges together so each can flourish." Some have called the network a nest, and perhaps that's how it will function, observes River Park pastor Adrian deLange: as "a landing place that will exist long enough, but not necessarily forever."

ENABLING LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

In a wide-ranging conversation about the network's still-evolving vision, deLange, Melenberg and Verhoef express a desire to build something "lightweight and low maintenance" yet robust enough to fill gaps created by denominational bodies that they describe as controlling, unsupportive, unhealthy – even toxic. "Classis Alberta North sweeps hard issues under the rug," Melenberg says. "There's no appetite to even pastorally care for those struggling with decisions coming out of Synod." In Alberta South, classical committees have withered and core services such as days of encouragement and church visits have suffered amid growing distrust and division, Verhoef adds. "The fruitfulness and a creativity that can come from a connective network isn't happening because the weight of connection feels disciplinary as opposed to supporting flourishing and local discernment."

As ideas surface about what the network might become, the word "local" permeates the conversation. By strengthening local ties, it's hoped the network will foster "relationships where we know each other well enough to support each other," Verhoef explains. "As my father-in-law used to say, 'I need something I can kind of wrap my heart around.'"

Pastor deLange envisions a network that fosters flourishing by very intentionally matching authority and responsibility. Rather than telling churches what to do while taking little responsibility for helping them do it, he says, far better to enable local congregations and missions to discern their own calling and then share responsibility for holding them accountable to their commitments. "Discerning the Spirit is what we're called to do as a local congregation. Listen, learn, support, cheer, challenge – that's all part of what good community is for."

Adrian deLange.

Dale Melenberg.

Paul Verhoef.

In decades past, churches benefited as pastors cared for each other through classically supported ministerial gatherings, Melenberg recalls. "It was a beautiful time of camaraderie, which took away competition and became about collaboration. That's missing today. Now we're fragmenting, and we don't know how to take care of each other." He hopes the Alberta Reformed Network will build on the classical history of pastoring pastors.

Already, the network is beginning to fill that void, Verhoef says. "When we've gathered so far, the biggest part of our time is listening to each other. Each church is feeling that they want to be heard and seen and loved. So we hear story after story." Being outside of denominational structures invites an added degree of honesty, he adds. "People feel free to express what they are thinking and explore differences without fear of consequence, without the emotional stakes being so high."

It's perhaps telling that some already involved in the network prefer to remain unnamed for now, even as they welcome the opportunity to engage. In response to a call for input to this article, an anonymous council member whose church is divided over remaining in the denomination describes the network as "a place that allows us to know we are not alone in our thoughts and processes."

NEW ALLIANCES STARTING

The Alberta Reformed Network is one of several connective efforts bubbling up as individuals and churches in the CRCNA seek support and new alliances within and beyond the denomination. Some early network participants are also active in other efforts and expect that to continue, Verhoef says. "We would hope this network doesn't try to take up all the energy in the room, but that it will be lifegiving and help steward some of the Kingdom vision the Reformed community has stewarded for a long time.

Network founders anticipate taking stock in three years, and charting next steps, if any. "My guess is some people will want to stay together and do something more solid and long term," deLange says. "Others may say 'thanks for the memories and relationships, but we're ready to move on.'"

As our conversation ends, Melenberg offers his hope for how the network might evolve. "The Alberta Reformed Network has gathered because of a pathos. Because of something we've been suffering," he observes. "But we also recognize we want to focus more on our ethos. More on the life-giving aspects of the church that we want to live into. We have to deal with the pathological aspects. As we get to know each other, we want to be pastorally sensitive. But we also want to move on into the life Christ offers."

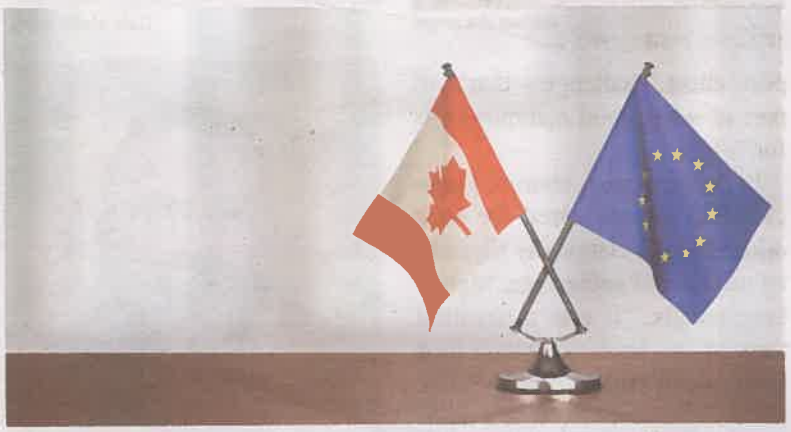
Cheryl Mahaffy

Cheryl is a member of Fellowship Church of Edmonton, a congregation that recently disaffiliated from the CRCNA.

TIME TO LEAN EUROPEAN?

Meghan Kort | meghan@christiancourier.ca

Meghan, CC's Assistant Editor, spent five months travelling in Europe with her husband in 2017 after she finished her Master's in French History.



IN FEBRUARY, WHEN FREELANCE JOURNALIST Sarah Lawrynuik approached a Ukrainian man in army fatigues outside the Odessa Opera House, he was understandably defensive. "You from United States?" he demanded. "I'm from Canada!" she replied, with haste. "Ah, from Canada. Good. Friend! Canada." Both laughed nervously as he agreed to the interview. The interaction was broadcast on a podcast from *The Economist* about a week after President Zelensky was bullied at the White House. Who can blame the soldier for asking if the journalist was friend or foe?

When I spent a semester in Kenya in 2012, I was constantly reminding my classmates and instructors that "no," I wasn't American. In fact, I was proud not to be American. Sometimes, people would drop their guard and beam back when I mentioned Canada, like the Ukrainian man, but not always.

One day, my diplomacy professor, who had once again gestured to me while talking about Americans, finally asked for clarification. "Well fine, but is Canada more like the U.S. or more like the UK?" Caught off guard, I replied, "We're halfway between the two." Which seemed to satisfy him and the rest of the class.

Why is it so hard to define Canada without reference to another global power? Would we rather be more American or more British? I guess it depends. Are we measuring height and weight or trying to spell "neighbour" correctly?

A NEW VIRUS

As a solidly middle global power, with a GDP comparable to Italy and Brazil, Canada doesn't have the luxury of going it alone. Canada is, in defence and diplomacy, a country that is only as strong as our friendships.

Unfortunately we're living in a decidedly less friendly global order. Protectionism is circulating like a virus these days. That's the term for what our American friends are experimenting with at the moment. I'm no economist, but here's the theory: if a country prevents or limits the import of goods from other countries, they can build up their own industries at home. That means barring goods that could be produced cheaper elsewhere for the sake of giving your home industry a shot. The last time protectionism was trending globally was about 100 years ago. "Protectionism played a pivotal role in heightened tensions before World War II," writes economist Rocio Gatdula in the *Georgetown Security Studies Review*. Even if "protecting your own" sounds like virtuous self-defence in some contexts, we should be concerned if protectionism is replacing free trade as the global standard for international relations.

Initially, when I started stewing over this editorial in February, I wanted to double down on the "buy Canadian" and "travel in Canada" message that our political leaders and grocery stores are delivering. But I think *CC* readers can handle a more nuanced argument. Of course, we should support Canadian businesses and services more than ever; buying Canadian is great. But we still need bananas from Mexico, vaccines from Europe and machinery from Japan. We shouldn't talk ourselves into going it alone just because our American friends seem enamoured with the idea. Canada will always be as strong as our friendships. That's why Mark Carney's first international trip as Prime Minister was to Paris and London, where he described Canada as "the most European of non-European countries." He's not the only Canadian who thinks so; an Abacus Data poll run at the end of February found that 44 percent of Canadians like the idea of our country joining the EU.

Maybe the feelings are mutual. Germany's foreign minister expressed kinship with Canada during G7 meetings taking place in La Malbaie, Que. in March, "We Europeans, we Germans, and Canada are not only partners; we are close friends. And friends have each other's back."

DEMOCRACY AT HOME

As we watch our leaders anxiously network on the global stage, I think we have a responsibility at home too. I believe political culture is something that starts at the grassroots. That means no matter how much our leaders tell us that we are multicultural, for example, we're not actually going to be a multicultural nation unless you and I decide to invite each other over for a potluck and risk trying something new.

Likewise, I think our calling as Canadian Christians right now is to resist the rise of protectionism in our own tiny ways. Our collective actions will add up to a political culture that supports free trade and international cooperation. That means, quite literally, showing friendship to all nationalities (even Americans!). Most of the Americans I've talked to since January are profoundly apologetic, but others (and some Canadians) continue to defend Donald Trump and Elon Musk. It won't be easy, but if we want to counter the protectionist impulse sweeping our world, we're going to have to find ways to ask thoughtful questions and give our neighbours the benefit of the doubt. What are they most afraid of? What do they love about Trump? Can we have that conversation over burritos?

If you live in a multicultural community or have the ability to travel, you probably have more opportunities to do the ground-level work that builds transnational friendships. My vision for this work comes from an experience I had when I was 24. I was sitting at a long weathered wooden table, at a backpacker's hostel in Prague. Like all tables with a bench on one side, the seating capacity seemed to be infinite. Even the chairs were sometimes shared, half a butt cheek each. Around the table a UN of dusty twenty-somethings convened. We talked about the sights we'd seen, foods we missed and global politics too.

"You're the ones with a feminist Prime Minister, right?" someone asked. My husband and I nodded slowly. It seemed that was the only news of Canada that had reached the EU in 2017.

Amidst the cacophony, a Mexican began a lecture and everyone chewed and listened. "We're all Americans," he exclaimed. "North, south, central, we're all Americans, really. I've had enough with one country saying they have exclusive claim to a title that belongs to two continents." I hadn't thought of that. I'm Canadian, so I didn't know Mexico City's soccer team was simply called "América." The Singaporeans had just arrived so everyone shoved over and somehow a few more place settings appeared.

I know I'm romanticizing my backpacking days, but I think there's a spark in that room that I want to carry with me today. How can we know what life is like in Mexico or Denmark or India unless we sit together and ask genuine questions? Even if that means allowing ourselves to be uncomfortable. Instead of reflexively protecting what we have, I hope we each have enough optimism left in these strange times to see each other's countries not as commodities or obstacles or enemies, but as friends.

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SYNOD IS ASKING FOR A BLANK CHEQUE

I heartily concur with Pastor Mike Borgert in "Re-Sign or Resign?" (Feb. 3). In the first place, I very much appreciate the insert "How did we get the Covenant for Officebearers?" that explained what it is and how it was rewritten. I have signed either that or the earlier Form of Subscription in both Surrey CRC, British Columbia and in Immanuel CRC, Hamilton, Ontario, and have been a delegate to both classis meetings and twice to Synod.

Your article was very clear and well-articulated and gave three reasons why the process was "deeply flawed." The first problem you identified was that this "was necessary to re-establish trust." In fact, this requirement comes from a clear suspicion and mistrust that persons who had previously signed might have changed their minds and would not say so. It exerts control by a "privileged" group over all others.

Secondly, I agree that Synod did not follow the Church Order *and Rules for Synodical Procedure* by failing to bring this confessional matter to a second Synod for ratification. Their reason for failing to do so – that it was a clarification and not a change – strikes me as an equivocation to hasten the process and ensure that they get their goal; there was no chance that a second synod might fail to ratify this decision.

Thirdly, I agree that it is very problematic that one must sign agreement to not only the confessions, but to whatever any future Synod may decide has confessional status. I don't write blank cheques to anyone.

I lament the direction that a part of the CRCNA is forcing on the denomination over objections from others, especially Canadian people and churches, as I see it. And I am uncertain about our future as CRCNA.

Herman Proper
Hamilton, Ont.

HOW ELSE TO 'SIGNIFY AGREEMENT'?

Since Classis is not a continuing body, I believe Synod should have required Classes to have delegates signify their agreement with the Covenant for Officebearers (CFO) at every Classis meeting ("Re-sign or resign" by Michael Borgert, Feb. 3). That is what is done at Synod, and what should be done at Classis as well. Also, in keeping with the language of the church order, the requirement should have been to have delegates "signify their agreement" with the CFO. Whether that is done by signing or standing, etc., should be up to the Classis.

Michelle Saville

WE NEED NATO

While I agree that the original purpose of NATO became obsolete with the fall of the Soviet Union ("The profoundly spiritual questions set in motion by MAGA" by Mark Vander Vennen, March 6), lamenting the fact that the organization was not disbanded is, I believe, flawed reasoning. While this perspective may make sense from a Canadian point of view, naively safe from our geographic position, this ignores the stark reality of the Eastern European countries for whom NATO membership has been the sole guarantor of independence and freedom.

I also take issue with the false correlation between insecurity and high defense spending. If Ukraine had spent a higher portion of their GDP on defense, is it not possible it could have deterred an invasion with better equipped and trained forces? If NATO nations had spent a higher portion of its GDP on defense, is it not possible Ukraine could have been better supported in its fight and greater enabled to maintain its freedom? Instead, NATO has realized that its defense spending has not been nearly high enough for the last 30 years in order to fully defend itself in the face of an adversary or in a prolonged conflict. For too long, NATO languished in a false "peace dividend" as it chose to ignore emerging threats in favour of keeping defense spending low in order to prioritize other areas of spending. Finally, the prospect of "reconfiguring defense spending towards peacemaking," as suggested, is odd. What does defense spending towards peacemaking look like versus other types of defense spending? How does one "make peace" if not through deterrence or the ability to effectively use force to backup one's word. In reality, warships, planes, and tanks do not have a "peace-making" configuration but rather can maintain peace through deterrence or impose peace through force.

Josh Horlings

PAGE 1 BIO

Brian Walsh is a retired campus pastor and an award-winning author. His most recent book is *Rags of Light: Leonard Cohen and the Landscape of Biblical Imagination* (reviewed on page 11). A longer version of this poem is available at christiancourier.ca.

Dear print readers,

We are launching a two-month campaign called **SAPLING** aimed specifically at our online readers.

It builds on the **EVERGREEN** campaign so faithfully supported by you last winter.

Our goal is to **encourage online readers to become digital donors**. A thriving forest needs new and old growth for long-term sustainability!

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Enjoy this Easter issue.

Students at Trinity Christian School in Burlington putting together the OrgelKids Kit.

INSPIRED BY *CC*, WE BUILT A PIPE ORGAN!

Thank you for "The 'King of Instruments'" (by Loretta Ostojic, Dec. 2). It introduced me to the OrgelKids program and inspired me to borrow an OrgelKids Kit from the Canadian College of Organists in Toronto. My grade 4 students and I have been learning about pipe organs, and building a pipe organ in class was a very exciting and inspiring culminating activity (see photo).

We are also visiting Knox Presbyterian Church in Burlington this spring. The church is turning 180 years old this June. We are meeting with the organist and he's going to play for us. I am so excited. Many of my students have not heard a pipe organ before. So thanks again for the article. It certainly inspired some great learning opportunities!

Sara Flokstra
Trinity Christian School,
Burlington, Ont.

CANADIAN SPELLING MATTERS

Reading the *CC* doesn't trigger the same high anxiety I feel when reading the Banner or the CRCNA website. It just occurred to me that one of many reasons for this difference in reaction is spelling! *CC* uses the correct Canadian conventions in spelling of words like "neighbour" while the other two publications consistently use only the foreign (American) spellings – like "neighbor." Thank you *CC* for making me feel at home when I read your thoughtful and correctly spelled words!! How can the CRCNA cover two countries when communications are conveyed using only one country's language/spelling?! (Am I joking? No!)

Pat Vanderkooy

CC EDITOR HEADING WEST!

As part of a book tour for *Blessed are the Undone*, *CC*'s Editor Angela Reitsma Bick will be travelling through Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. from May 27 to June 7, DV. And she'd love to meet *CC* subscribers along the way! Tour dates and locations at blessedundone.ca.

THE WAR YEARS

A final goodbye in Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Ineke Neutel

IT'S STILL DARK WHEN I WAKE UP. A thought pierces my heart: today is the funeral. Four days ago, on February 22, 1944, an American bombardment tore the heart out of Nijmegen, our city, and shattered our family by killing my eight-year-old brother, Jos. Jos is short for Josef, meaning "God adds." Yes, God adds, but he also takes. Why, God? Why Jos? Jos was special – a sweet, gentle and exceptionally musical little boy. We were so proud and grateful when Arvo, our church organist, offered to give him the organ lessons that our family would never be able to afford.

The last few days have passed like fog. Everything seems unreal. Wednesday, Papa went to tell Mama in the hospital that our little Jos was gone. Mama was devastated. Arvo came by and cried with us. He'd grown to love the little guy even though he'd only known Jos for a few months. "He had so much promise. He could have become a great church organist."

"Maybe he's an organist now," I said quietly. Arvo looked at me and nodded.

We cooked a red cabbage that the Baroness gave us last night – it tasted good. But it's hard to appreciate anything when Jos is not with us. He would've had such a big smile eating the cabbage. Usually we have only potatoes, sometimes with beets or carrots, but often only potatoes.

A FUNERAL FOR 500

Today, we say goodbye to Jos. We have to be at the Concert Building at 2:00 o'clock. More than 500 victims will be buried at the same time. We're all dressed in our darkest and best clothes, even though our best clothes are not great these days. Tom's suit is way too small for him; his ankles and wrists stick out. But at least it's a dark suit. We start walking towards the Concert Building – Papa, Tom, Margo and me. The little ones, Lienie and Wimpie, are with Mrs. De Herder, our neighbour. Mama's still in hospital and Henk . . . who knows where Henk is. He doesn't even know yet that Jos is gone.

The master of ceremonies is Mr. Hondius, a city councillor who's the acting mayor since the mayor is said to be ill. I'm glad Mayor van Lokhorst isn't here. He's a fanatic Nazi, and no one likes him. Mr. Hondius is also a Nazi, but more reasonable. He tells us that more than 700 people died in the bombing, and many more wounded are in the hospital. I wonder what happened to the people hiding from the Germans, like my brother Henk. We have not heard anything from or about him since the day he left. Would Henk's body be lying somewhere below the rubble? No, no . . . . I think Henk is out of town with a farmer somewhere . . . . He must be, he must be.

Wikipedia

A monument in Graafseweg Cemetery to lives lost in the "accidental bombing" in Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

A COMMOTION AT THE FRONT

In the background, beautiful organ music by Bach envelops us. Mr. Hondius introduces a well-known soprano who sings "Nearer my God to Thee." The song is magnificent, and she sings it with such expression that I start to cry. Tom puts his arm around my shoulders. Papa looks somewhat dazed. Mr. Hondius explains that Father Van der Heyden, the pastor of St. Stephen's Catholic Church, and the Rev. van Selms, representing the Protestant churches, will each conduct a service, one after another. I don't envy the speakers: what can you say when hundreds of people die so needlessly?

When the pastors are finished, someone comes rushing forward. Oh, no. It's Mayor van Lokhorst. What does he want? He rushes up the steps and makes his way to the podium. He almost pushes Mr. Hondius out of the way. Van Lokhorst starts a long rambling speech. He accuses the Americans of mass murder and claims people in Nijmegen now know better than to think the Americans are their liberators. I'm furious at the mayor for spoiling the funeral service with his outburst. If those Nazis had not started this war, this bombing would not have happened. No matter what the mayor says, I'll continue to hope fervently that the Allies keep fighting for our liberation. As we leave the building, the organist plays pieces by Handel and Grieg.

Outside, it's cold but dry and sunny. We move slowly, forming a procession at least a kilometre long. Crowds of people line both sides of the road all along the route. The men take off their hats as the hearse passes by. The women look on silently. All we hear are the clip-clop of the horses and the creaking of the hearse's wheels ahead of us. The road from the Concert Building to the Graafseweg Cemetery usually would take about half an hour to walk. Today, it takes well over an hour. I think about Jos, how he liked to go for walks with me, how he would have loved to hear that lady sing "Nearer my God to Thee." It was one of his favourite songs. Margo comes close and holds my hand.

"I miss Jos too," she says. Papa still looks lost, and I grab his hand with my other hand. Tom takes Margo's hand, and hand in hand, the four of us walk on.

'BY LOVE O'ERSHADOWED'

When we finally reach the cemetery, I notice the crowd forms layers around two enormous rectangular graves. There are long rows of coffins placed side by side – the coffins that arrived by train from all over the country in the last two days. I can no longer cry. I'm worn out. Where is God in all this?

Suddenly, someone nearby starts singing softly: "Safe in the arms of Jesus / Safe on his gentle breast / There by his love o'ershaded / Sweetly my soul shall rest." Gradually, more and more people join in. By the second stanza, many are singing. Hearing this song, sung so often at a child's funeral, gives me a measure of peace.

After a while, Margo pulls at my arm, "Let's go." We turn around and walk away quietly. Others are leaving as well. Soon, we arrive at Mrs. De Herder's house to pick up Lienie and Wimpie. Mrs. De Herder sees us coming.

"They were very quiet, as if they knew something was wrong. I think they miss Jos already. By the way, I have way too much food – why don't I bring you enough to eat, say, at 5:30?"

I say "Thank you" with tears streaming down my face.

At home, Wimpie turns to me and says, "Jos, Jos?" Suddenly overwhelmed, I whisper, "Jos is playing the organ in heaven."

Wimpie's face lights up: "Jos, ow'an. Jos, ow'an."

WHAT HAPPENED IN NIJMEGEN?

US Army

Devastation of the inner city in Nijmegen after the bombing.

On February 22, 1944, American forces bombed the German-occupied Dutch city of Nijmegen killing almost 800 Dutch people, nearly all civilians. This *CC* story is fictional but based on detailed eyewitness accounts.

LIBERATION DAY: MAY 8, 1945

Over 7,600 Canadian soldiers died from 1944-1945 in Allied efforts to liberate the Netherlands. Throughout May 2025, Veterans Affairs Canada and partners in the Netherlands will mark the 80th anniversary of the Liberation of the Netherlands and V-E Day with ceremonies in both countries. See a list of events, including plans for the CN Tower to light up as a "Beacon of Peace," at veterans.gc.ca, and page 23 in *CC* for concert information on the Liberation Choir.

Ineke Neutel

Ineke (nee van Dijk) lived through the devastation of Nijmegen; she was five years old in 1944, four blocks away from the bombing. A retired research scientist with Health Canada, Ineke writes historical fiction books that portray the effects of war and occupation on the people.

AND THERE'S MORE

Criticism, concern and sorrow in comments to *CC* from survey respondents. | **Marlene Bergsma**

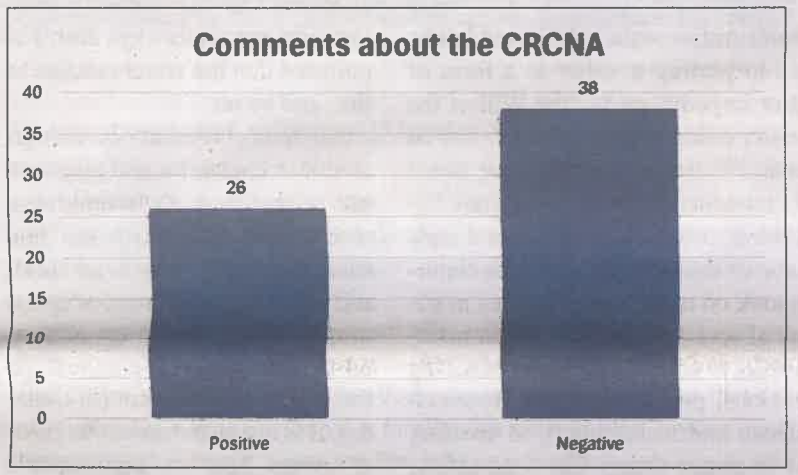
AFTER ANSWERING OVER A DOZEN QUESTIONS and providing thousands of additional explanations for their responses, hundreds of Canadians who participated in *Christian Courier*'s survey of members of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) still had more to say.

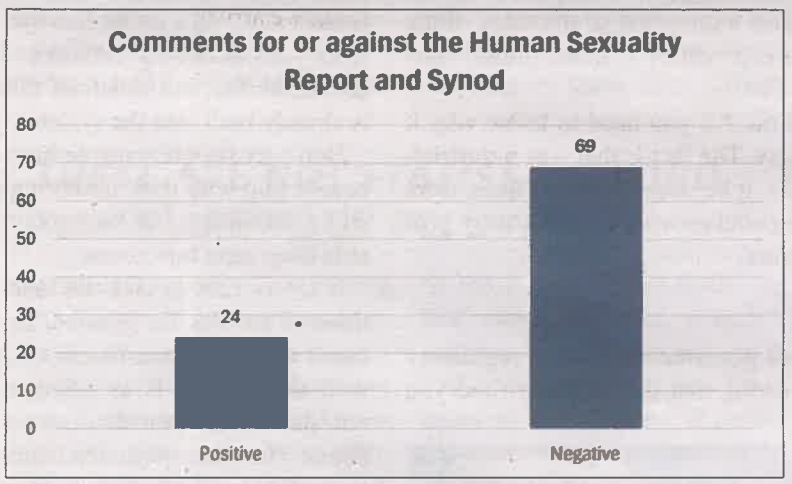
Close to 300 took advantage of the invitation to respond to the final open-ended query: *Is there anything else you want us to know?*

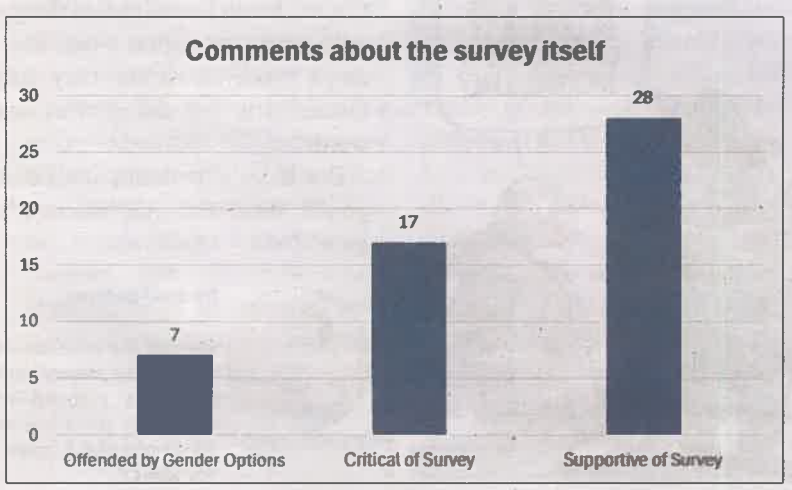
Sixty-nine comments were directed at *Christian Courier (CC)*, with some people criticizing *CC*'s "woke" and "progressive" coverage of all topics, and others expressing gratitude for balance and nuance.

In all, there were 275 additional comments, with many expressing sadness or lament for the state of the CRC in Canada. About one-third, 82, were provided by people who support the direction of Synod on human sexuality because they indicated they have no difficulty signing the Covenant for Officebearers. Many of those people complained about the survey itself, accusing *Christian Courier* of stirring up dissension or being schismatic.

A few others encouraged those who disagree with Synod's recent decisions to leave the denomination, or quoted Scripture to explain the eternal consequences of disagreement with the Human Sexuality Report.







Several of those supporters said they are convinced the majority of CRC members in Canada share their views and that concerns about the direction of the denomination on human sexuality come from a small minority.

The overriding theme, though, was sadness.

"The CRC boasted it would get to 400,000 members by 2000, but we are now well under 200,000.

'The CRC boasted it would get to 400,000 members by 2000, but we are now well under 200,000.'

"Synod 2024 has made a decision. If you don't like it, join another Reformed congregation/denomination," wrote one, and another: "I pray for a split in the denomination."

The remaining 193 comments came from those who weren't sure about signing the Covenant or who said they would not sign it. Many of those respondents expressed gratitude for the survey and the opportunity to be heard (see "Empty Council Rooms" on page 24 for a breakdown of who is willing to sign the Covenant for Officebearers).

'THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE'

There were 28 comments in support of the survey, 17 critical of the survey, and seven people who were upset that the demographic question about gender allowed for more than a male or female response.

Writers also expressed support or dissatisfaction with the direction of the CRCNA. Of the 26 people who expressed support for the denomination, 25 of those comments came from people who would sign the Covenant for Officebearers. All 38 comments expressing dissatisfaction or concern about the direction of the denomination came from people who wouldn't sign the covenant, or weren't sure.

A total of 93 respondents also specifically referenced the Human Sexuality Report or the way Synod has handled it. Most of those comments (69) came from people who wouldn't sign the Covenant for Officebearers, while 24 comments supported Synod and the HSR.

"Synod 2024 has made a decision. If you don't like it, join another Reformed congregation/denomination," wrote one. "Families and friends will be pitted against each other, and it feels like the wrong spirit is directing decisions at Synod – a spirit of division and control. Merriam-Webster's (USA) dictionary's word for 2024 was 'polarization.' Synod has participated in the spirit of the age."

"I am in the process of resigning from the CRC," wrote another. "It breaks my heart."

And the impacts are on young and old. "I have attended church weekly for 65+ years and I have not attended since Synod of 2024," wrote one. "We have a 17-year-old child who would like to profess their faith," wrote another, "but they won't because of the Synod adding the HSR as a confessional."

Marlene Bergsma

Marlene, CC's Features editor, lives in the Niagara Region where she hikes, camps, paddles, cycles and runs.

HOW DOES ALBERTA COMPARE TO THE REST OF CANADA?

Separately from *CC*'s survey, *CC* writer Jenna Boone gathered information from church pastors and administrators on 28 of Alberta's 45 CRC churches to determine their current relationship to the denomination (see page 2) – 15 from Classis Alberta South and 13 from Classis Alberta North.

Then we compared those numbers to question 7 in *CC*'s survey, which was sent to people across Canada: "Which phrase best describes the current situation in your local congregation?" Our survey allowed for more than one answer, which is why the 2nd column doesn't add up to 100%. Responses not shown here include "participating in conversations about a distinct CRC in Canada" (22%), none of the above (2%) and "I no longer attend a CRC" (7%).

Neither set of data here can be considered representative; they are estimates, at best – our attempt to map a complex denominational landscape that is changing quickly. We are sharing this snapshot of Alberta because in that province, apart from any guidance or support from the denomination or their Classes, disaffiliating congregations and those staying CRCNA are organizing themselves in a loose alliance called the Alberta Reformed Network. See page 3 for more.

	Alberta research for *CC* article	**All of Canada** *CC*'s survey
Staying CRCNA	19 churches (68%)	412 people (34%)
Too soon to know/ Not talking about it	4 churches (14%)	344 people (29%)
Discussing disaffiliation	3 churches (11%)	171 people (14%)
Already gone	2 churches (7%)	112 people (9%)

What's your church doing? To help *CC* accurately keep track of the landscape in Canada, please email us with information about the conversation in your congregation: editor@christiancourier.ca

REALITY CHECK

The U.S. is not actually poor, and bureaucracy is not inherently corrupt. | **Michael DeMoor**

Molly Riley / White House.

President Donald Trump with Indian Prime Minister Narenda Modi at the White House February 13.

THE UNITED STATES IS NEITHER POOR NOR WEAK. It doesn't have to sell out its most treasured traditions, its longest-standing allies and its reputation as a generous, law-abiding, and cooperative nation in order to put the screws to its own people, to its allies and to those who depend on it for survival.

Cutting social programs, foreign aid and basic functions of government is a choice.

The USA is the richest and most powerful country that has ever existed. Yet it has somehow convinced itself that it is poor and has been taken advantage of by everyone. It has the capacity (financial and political) to pursue social justice and even generosity in ways unimaginable both in history and in our current world. But it is acting like it can't afford to provide healthcare to its people or aid to others or to buy rare earth minerals at fair market prices from a country in a fight for its very life.

Why is this? There are many reasons, but the key one I want to focus on is economic/fiscal. The U.S. has convinced itself that low marginal tax rates (benefiting the wealthiest the most) are the key to its prosperity. That means two things:

First, that it starves its governments of the means to pay for social programming that provides benefits for all. This makes it seem like "we can't afford" Medicare or SNAP (food stamps) or what have you because of budget deficits. But those deficits are a choice – a choice not to generate revenues (via taxes) that would cover these things.

Second, that it cuts taxes for those well-off and does not provide sufficient support for the rest of the people, which exacerbates massive economic inequality. That means that – even though the per capita GDP of the U.S. is over $80,000 – lots of people really are living on not enough while others are so wealthy they can essentially buy political office.

So you end up in a situation where – partly because a lot of folks really are struggling to make ends meet – the powerful can convince a majority of the public that the nation is poor and needs to use its power to shake down friendly nations, deprive its own people of necessary supports, and continue to cut the taxes of the well-off.

But this is all a choice. When politicians shrug and say "we'd love to fund __, but we just can't afford it," they are being dishonest. Collectively, the nation is rich beyond the dreams of even our grandparents. If it decides to act like it's poor (and subject many of its people to poverty) that's a choice. And it's probably not a choice that benefits you.

And before my fellow Canadians (especially Albertans) get too smug, this applies to us as well as the U.S.: we choose to act like we

Cagle Cartoons.

are poor and powerless in ways that benefit only a few of us.

RED TAPE EXISTS FOR A REASON

So what does benefit us collectively? What is a good use of our collective power?

You've likely heard the term "administrative state" (AS) used lately, mostly by political actors who want to portray it either as a form of corruption and waste, or as a threat or impediment to "the Will of the people" (code for a president or premier doing whatever s/he wants on the grounds that s/he narrowly won an election). You may have heard the term associated with others like "bureaucracy" and "deep state."

The administrative state is a real thing. It names the increased state functions that emerged over the course of the late 19th and 20th centuries. During that time, governments took on more and new roles in society – from providing certain forms of social insurance (health insurance and deposit insurance, for example) to creating and administering public services (such as public pensions, public education, research and development investment in science and technology), to creating regulations and regulatory agencies to ensure things like food safety, financial honesty, safe vehicle manufacturing, preventing pollution and much more. All of these things do cost money and so the share of the national income (GDP) that is state expenditure is much greater now than it was in the late 19th century.

However, to properly understand the AS you need to know why it developed and what it does for society. The fact is that – as industrialization and mass society developed – it became clear that there were necessary things that only the state could provide and necessary protections that only the state could ensure.

BUREAUCRACY BENEFITS YOU

Take food safety, for example. Until governments passed regulatory legislation, you had no way of knowing that the prepared food you

Cagle Cartoons.

bought was safe or even that it was what the label said it was. As more people depended on prepared food (and we all do for a huge portion of our diets), just telling customers to beware of what they bought was increasingly pointless – "caveat emptor" was not something consumers could feasibly do, and the big food corporations weren't going to regulate themselves. This is what economists call market failure, a situation where the free market and individual choice are not going to provide a certain good or prevent a harm. In such cases, it falls to government to step in. And that's a good use of our collective wealth.

I could tell a similar story about workplace health and safety, avoiding old-age poverty, making sure our waterways aren't so polluted that the water catches on fire, and so on.

All of this bureaucracy, though, is still overseen by and responsible to the people's elected representatives (primarily the legislative branch). It gets no funds and is not allowed to act or spend money unless permitted, allocated or mandated by congress (in the U.S.) or Parliament (in Canada). It is not an autonomous power centre bent on confounding the "Will of the people." It's not perfect and – like all human systems – it's in need of reform and accountability, but much of that is already built into the system.

Don't let people scare or bamboozle you with dark mutterings about a corrupt and unaccountable deep state bureaucracy.

It's very easy to take the functions of the AS for granted, because when they are functioning well their effect is as often as not about what you don't experience (horrible pollution, runs on banks, mass poisonings from tinned beans) and these things only come to notice when they don't work or when they are obstacles to our doing what we want.

But there's no doubt at all that you'll miss the AS when it's gone.

Michael DeMoor

Michael is a professor in the Politics, History and Economics program at the King's University in Edmonton and a columnist with CC.

THE IMPACT OF DISCONTINUED FUNDING

If you were a subsistence farmer today, where would you turn? | **Naomi Bula**

With international and local partners, World Renew is offering food assistance in South Sudan. ZOA

USAID CONTRACTS SUPPORTED HUMANITARIAN and development work in 160 countries in 2023, offering food distribution or healthcare. Recent cuts to this funding will likely eliminate 5,800 of 6,200 multiyear USAID contract awards, for a total cut of $54 billion. When funding of such magnitude is uncertain, what impact does that have on people benefitting from it?

Imagine that you live in a small village. You started your life over from scratch when your house was destroyed in a flood several years ago. Since then, the climate has been unpredictable, meaning that every harvest is a gamble for your family. Yet your garden is your main source of subsistence. There are few jobs to be had in your village, and whenever you've tried to sell the excess produce from that garden, none of your neighbours have the means to purchase them.

Still, you keep trying. You learn sustainable agriculture methods through a free community program and employ them. Sure enough, your crops grow stronger than you could've imagined. You participate in additional livelihood skills training and you're able to supplement your income by doing some tailoring. A Village Savings and Loans Association has taught you about financial management, and it has opened new possibilities for you and your family.

But one day, you discover that the local clinic has lost funding and is no longer able to provide you with anti-retroviral medication. For you and others who live with HIV/AIDS (you contracted it at birth), this medication is something you rely on. Without it, you fear that your next bout of pneumonia could be your last. What will your children do if you can't help feed them?

With increasingly limited options, you begin to look around for alternative ways to survive. You ask your brother for help, but his contract position with the local clinic was terminated due to discontinued foreign funding. He is struggling, too. You remember how your cousin found herself in the same position as you 10 years ago, and how she moved to a neighbouring country with more opportunities. But conflict between your governments has caused that border to close and travel in the region seems to be fraught with danger.

Where will you turn next?

World Renew supports pre-natal care clinics like this one in Kenya, but many of these clinics have lost funding for other projects. This has led to a lack of staff and supplies.

WORLD RENEW & ITS PARTNERS

The story above isn't the story of any particular person, but it is an amalgam of the many, many stories that the team I work with has heard from communities across the Global South. As climate change, conflict and the withdrawal of USAID funding lead to dire consequences, World Renew is faithfully pursuing our mission of mercy and compassion. Support offered through World Renew and our partners around the globe can bring hope in situations of despair. Advocating for funding from our governments can help us extend resources to those who have the most difficulty accessing them (see worldrenew.ca/foodgrains for ideas on how to start). And praying for our global neighbours is what we're called to do as Christ followers.

A colleague shared this reminder from the global Christian community: "The most effective, integrated and faithful measures to address poverty and injustice are rooted in local churches that were established hundreds of years before USAID was formed. These organizations will long outlive any contracts or agreements with any government. As we navigate the uncertainties of our time, our efforts will be most fruitful if we work in unity."

Naomi Bula

Naomi works as Director of Marketing and Communications for World Renew Canada. She and her husband live part-time on his family farm in Zambia and love spending time with their three children and two grandchildren.

THESE ARE NOT STATISTICS, LORD. THESE ARE YOUR BELOVED.

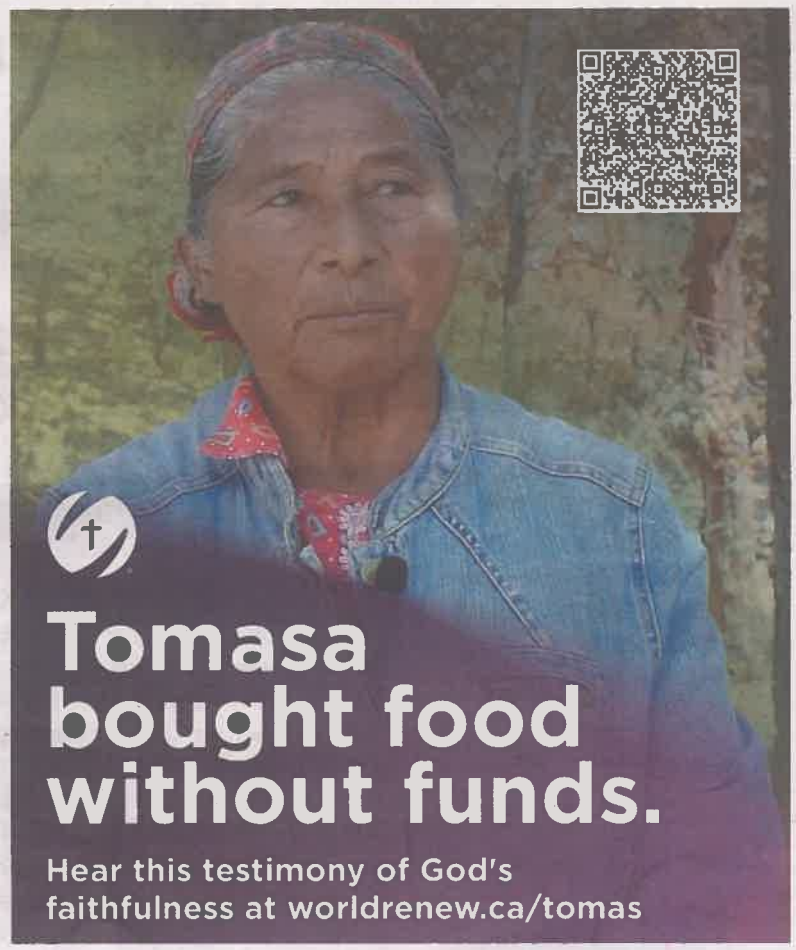
"LORD, YOU HAVE TOLD US what you require of us: to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with you (Micah 6:8). Lord, we come with heavy hearts, knowing that justice has been withheld, that mercy has been denied. We lament the choices of those in power who have turned away from the suffering of your children. We grieve policies that strip life-saving aid from those in deepest need, funding that has been withdrawn from clinics where babies take their first breaths, from hospitals where mothers fight to survive childbirth, from communities where clean water and medicine once flowed.

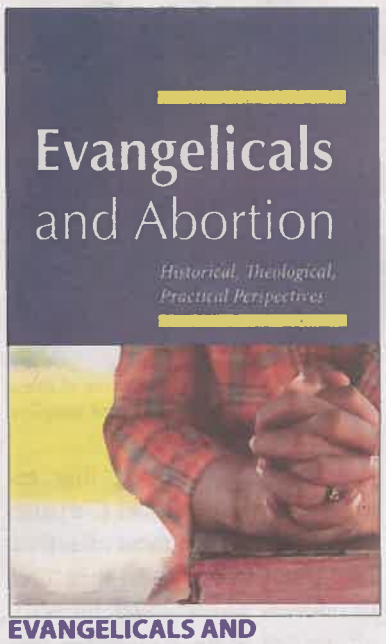
"God of justice, open the eyes of those who lead. Let us see that when aid is cut, it is not just numbers on a page – it is real lives lost, those that Jesus looks in the eye and declares, 'You are mine!' It is a mother in Malawi who can no longer receive the medicine that kept her child alive. It is a grandmother in Guatemala who watches her family go hungry because food assistance has stopped. It is a village in Ethiopia where children die from preventable diseases because the clinic's doors have closed. These are not statistics, Lord. These are your beloved.

"So we pray, O God, for the nations of the world – for leaders and governments, for those with wealth and power – that they may not turn away from the least of these. May they open their hands and their hearts, not in charity alone, but in justice. Let them see that when we lift up the poor, we do not lose; we all rise.

"We pray for those on the front lines – for our church partners and sister organizations – who are your hands and feet among the poor. Strengthen them. Protect them. Bless the work of their hands so that those in need may receive not just bread, but dignity; not just aid, but hope."

Excerpt from a prayer shared by Carol Bremer-Bennett, World Renew U.S. Co-Director, at a Prayer Vigil for Foreign Aid in Washington, DC, on March 11.





EVANGELICALS AND ABORTION: HISTORICAL, THEOLOGICAL, PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES
J. Cameron Fraser
Wipf & Stock, 2024.

A WELL-REASONED STUDY OF CHRISTIANS AND ABORTION

James Dekker

EVANGELICALS AND ABORTION (E&A) is the most recent book by Rev. J. Cameron Fraser, a retired Christian Reformed pastor from Lethbridge, Alberta. An articulate conservative thinker, he has published several books and articles in *The Banner, Christian Courier* and in various Reformed and Presbyterian journals and periodicals. Fraser is an able, widely and deeply read pastor with an academic style occasionally reflected in this short book. It is very tightly written, but a readable and informative history of the Pro-Life movement in North America – born out of his long personal involvement with Right to Life movements in the U.S. and Canada.

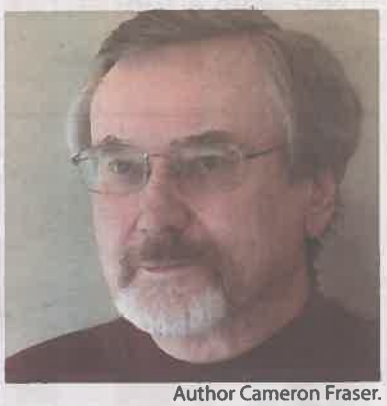
Fraser's well-reasoned tone is rarely seen in writing on abortion. His 'on-one-hand-this' but 'on-the-other-hand-that' provides a book-long conversation that is winsomely dialectical and honest. While taking a clear stand against unlegislated abortion – no law regulates abortion in Canada – Fraser writes with deep empathy for women considering abortion, is never mean-spirited, and always keeps the fetuses' lives in focus. Plainly devoted to pro-life principles, Fraser is fittingly wary of extremism in thought and action that has sadly diminished Right to Life's public credibility and integrity. He opposes violence against abortionists and abortion clinics and strongly criticizes those resorting to such extremes.

Evangelicals and Abortion is a product of exhaustive background research that limns pro-life's history and wider society's responses to the movement's activities. It surveys abortion legislation up to U.S. Supreme Court's 2022 Dobbs vs. Jackson decision. Fraser's research is assiduously documented with dozens of footnotes, an index and a bibliography.

Fraser added an appendix with *Christianity Today* article about Norma McCorvey. She was the woman behind the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision that opened virtually unrestricted abortion. Ms. McCorvey (a.k.a. "Jane Roe") led a sad life, supporting anti-abortion movement in her later years, but confessing on her deathbed that she was well-paid for that activity, though not really committed to it.

Already in the Introduction, Fraser subtly foreshadows his eventual conclusion. There he sketches the beginnings of Crisis Pregnancy Centres (CPCs), highlighting the establishment of Vancouver's CPC. He finally notes "there are now more CPCs in the USA than there are abortion clinics." On the last page, Fraser effectively bookends that introduction of CPCs with this brief, irenic advocacy: "It is not insignificant that the Christian Action Council with its legislative focus found it more effective to transform itself into Care Net with emphasis on pregnancy care centers and related ministries."

With discussion questions after each chapter, *E&A* offers a stimulating read for book clubs or church small group discussions. This book is by far the best writing I've read on abortion and I highly recommend it.


Author Cameron Fraser.

James Dekker

Retired Christian Reformed pastor Jim Dekker lives in St. Catharines, Ont. Jim finally "met" Cameron Fraser in a January Zoom call, an event he's looked forward to for many years.

THE ROYAL IN YOU
Jordan Raynor
Illustrated by Jonathan D. Voss
WaterBrook, 2024.

WHEN HEAVEN COMES DOWN

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

We'll look up at the sky and see heaven descend.
Jesus said He won't stay in the clouds way up there.
He'll bring heaven to earth, and he'll live with us here.

IN A NOTE TO PARENTS AT THE CONCLUSION of this hopeful book, which explores what the Bible teaches about heaven, author Jordan Raynor writes that when he was a child, he dreaded the thought of heaven because, after all, what would there be to do for a kid who loved to play and paint. However, as an adult, Raynor studied the Bible to learn what it teaches about heaven and discovered truth contrary to his childhood perceptions. "While I used to view heaven with confusion, boredom and fear, today I find myself frequently day-dreaming about heaven and the new earth with biblical clarity, excitement, and hope," he writes on his website.

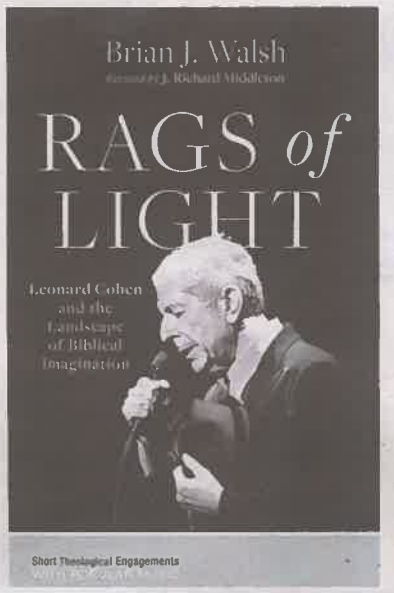
With lilting, rhyming text, Raynor's new book *The Royal in You* simply and clearly explains for children what he learned – Jesus will bring heaven to earth, make all things new, and will live with people here; heaven will include the works of God's hands and some of the works of people's hands; and believers will reign for eternity with Christ by "filling, subduing, and exploring the New Earth."

Illustrator Jonathan Voss's energetic artwork pulses with hope and joy, pulling children into Raynor's poetry: "When heaven comes down, / we'll all rush to meet Jesus, / bringing paintings, inventions, / and gifts for Him with us. / . . . There will be no more sin, / no more sickness or sadness, / just the best things made perfect, / bringing God and us gladness. / . . . But the best part by far is / King Jesus will be there, / making everything new with / His peace, love, and care. / And now you might think that our story is ending, / but in fact, this is just the beginning. / Because Jesus wants you to rule with Him – / to explore and fill the kingdom of heaven with Him."

The Royal in You is a celebration of our hope as Christians. It's an excellent resource to help children understand what the Bible teaches about the new heaven and new earth and eternal life with God.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Sonya is a freelance writer living in St Catharines, Ont.



RAGS OF LIGHT: LEONARD COHEN AND THE LANDSCAPE OF BIBLICAL IMAGINATION
Brian J. Walsh
Foreword by J. Richard Middleton
Wipf and Stock, 2024.

SCRIPTURAL LONGING IN THE SONGS OF LEONARD COHEN

Walter Miedema

IN THE PREFACE to *Rags of Light*, Brian Walsh describes his new book as an attempt to "bring [Leonard] Cohen and Scripture together within the context of our present cultural realities and spiritual struggles and see what happens." The book takes its shape from a series of lectures Walsh gave as part of an online course on Cohen's prayers and songs, hosted on his website – bibleremixed.ca.

Walsh first sets out to show the appropriateness of bringing Cohen and Scripture into conversation. He describes Cohen as a sort of post-secular prophet who does not see spiritual matters as separate from daily life and has no illusions about people's need for God as they face the trials of the human condition.

jewhyte / iStock Editorial / Getty Images Plus via Getty Images.

Montreal skyline on a summer evening with Leonard Cohen mural.

A BROADER LONGING

Walsh heralds Cohen's genius of using the erotic to illuminate and express the deep longing that humans have for connection, intimacy and, ultimately, God. To him, Cohen's work suggests that we should adopt a wider concept of eros that includes this broader longing. Cohen does this by often blurring the lines between expressing a longing for a human lover and a longing for God.

Cohen's expressions of longing are accompanied by a theme of brokenness and loss. It may be surprising to some to see how closely his approach parallels Calvinist sentiment expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism about our need to recognize the depths of our brokenness in order to find true healing and satisfaction.

In the book's second chapter, Walsh explores how Cohen's Jewish identity gives him a story and context that allow for healing and wholeness because they present a God who is willing to change his mind to preserve his relationship with humanity. On the other hand, Walsh also points out that Cohen does not see the process of potential reconciliation after breaking covenant relationships as easy. His vision for reconciliation requires us to wrestle with God and admit of our wrongdoing – to confess that we are, as Walsh writes, "incurable covenant breakers." Walsh bases these observations primarily on Cohen's 1984 collection of Psalm-like prayer poems, *Book of Mercy*, and his album of the same year *Various Positions*, on which Cohen's most famous song "Hallelujah" first appeared.

MUSIC FOR COVENANT BREAKERS

Walsh claims Cohen's oeuvre as a "manual for living with defeat" – a manual for living with our failure to keep our part of the covenant agreement.

While discussing scriptural themes in Cohen's lyrics, Walsh provides examples of events in biblical history where patriarchs and kings acted in ways that broke the covenant. At least two of the examples are not typically seen as causing a rift in the covenant. Walsh highlights Cohen's suggestion that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son in the song "The Story of Isaac" is a failure in keeping the covenant. Also, in the song "Lover, Lover, Lover," Israel's act of building a temple widens the rift between Israel and Yahweh God by seeking to limit him.

The book's third chapter focuses how Cohen's prophetic voice can jar us into recognition of the ways our covenant breaking has twisted and perverted created order. Walsh contrasts Cohen's songs "The Future" and "Democracy" to reveal the tension between despair and hope in Cohen's work. "The Future" dwells on the coming dissolution of order and unmooring of created order stating: "Won't be nothing/ Nothing you can measure anymore." In "Democracy" the speaker is "drunk" but, "still holding up this little wild bouquet," implying that democracy can break through the idolatry and greed, even that of nations sure they already have a handle on these vices. In Cohen's view, it seems, true "democracy" can get to the heart of where it's most needed: the very places where need exists, and the brokenness of the human condition is recognized and shared. In these places, true repentance can then exist. Walsh sees Cohen's concept of repentance as admitting "that you're in a mess of your own making and the judgement is just."

PROPHET AND PRIEST

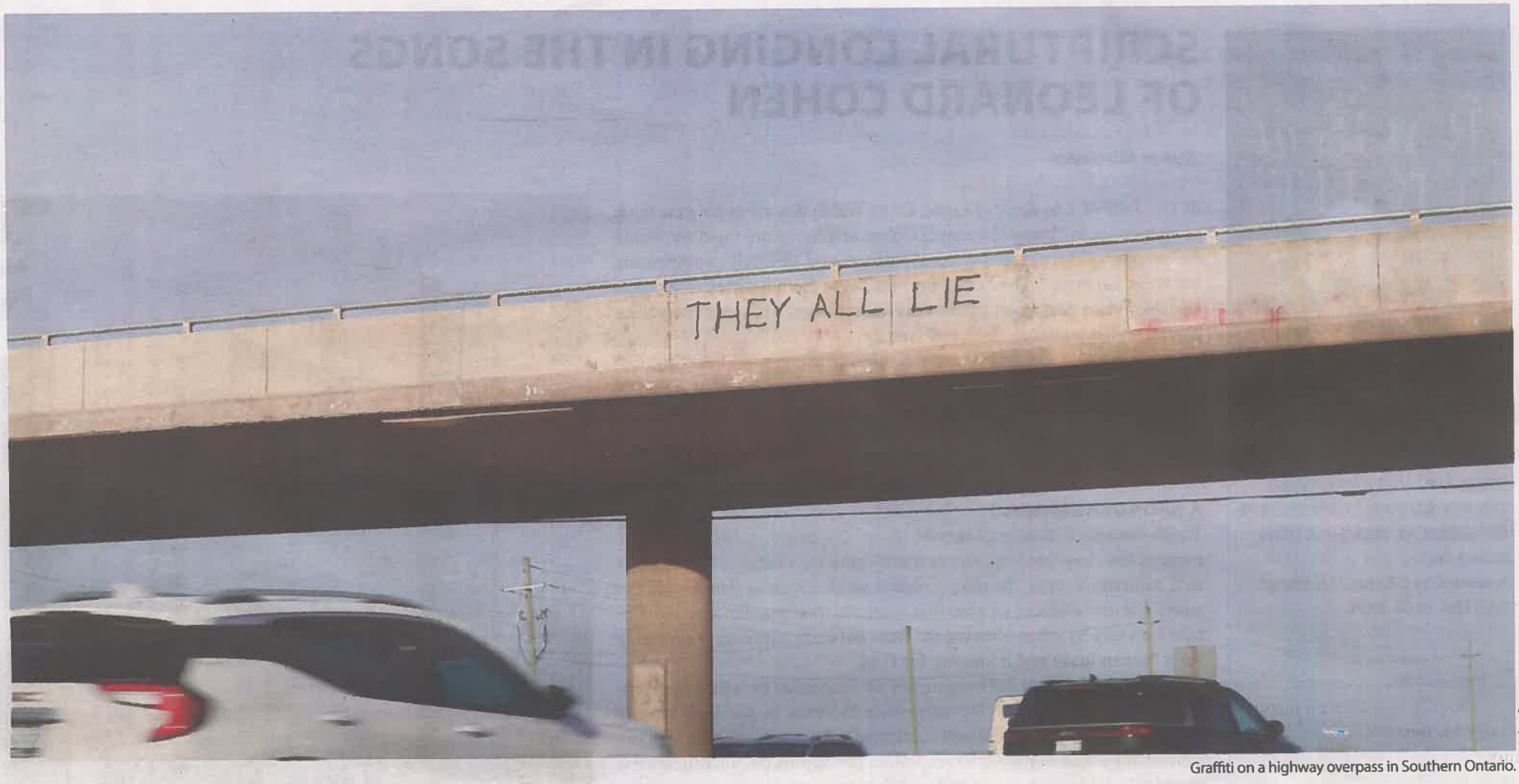
Walsh believes that Cohen can help to lead us to a place of repentance, like a biblical prophet. In the last chapter of *Rags of Light*, he shows us how Cohen can function as a priest offering us comfort and guiding us in our posture of repentance and reconciliation with a loving God. For Cohen, there is no easy out, no healing without pain. The process of sanctification and turning toward the healing offered by a loving God is "almost like the blues." It involves pain and discomfort but ultimately offers healing, even if it doesn't reach completion on this side of death. Light entering into the darkness requires the crack that Cohen sings of in his song "Anthem." Revealing that crack requires abandoning the pursuit of perfection, allowing for a space where we covenant breakers can still praise God with a "Hallelujah" amid our confusion.

Cohen's take on God did not reach a simple or easy resolution. Songs from *You Want It Darker*, Cohen's final album released before his death, place accusations and uncertainty at the feet of God. Ultimately, however, Walsh highlights Cohen as a poet and songwriter who models the act of showing up and engaging with God. Any of us inveterate covenant breakers can learn from his example. Walsh appreciates that Cohen's spirituality is one of struggle with a God who is willing to wrestle with us when we refuse to quiet our complex questions.

Walsh's style is academic but also approachable and accessible. *Rags of Light* is a must read for any Cohen fan seeking to think deeply about his music and poetry while also seeking to learn what he can teach us about being a person of faith.

Walter Miedema

Walter is a full-time high school custodian and a part-time preacher. His heart loves storytelling of all sorts. He lives in London, Ontario.



Marlene Bergsma

Graffiti on a highway overpass in Southern Ontario.

THE SPIRIT OF OUR AGE

Why we need healthy institutions in a time of great dis-ease. | **Syd Hielema**

ONE OF THE overpasses along the Queen Elizabeth Way in southern Ontario is spray-painted with three short words: "They all lie."

THINK ABOUT IT: 'THEY ALL LIE.'

This anonymous graffiti-sociologist has captured the zeitgeist of our age profoundly. This epithet identifies a spirit that is fuelled by cynicism, suspicion, anger and even contempt. This spirit affects every part of our society, including Christian communities and organizations. And it helps to explain why so many Christian leaders are exhausted, discouraged, insecure and fearful. As a pastor said to me, "I and my colleagues have decided to just keep our heads down and keep moving one step at a time." Elon Musk's newly created "Department of Government Efficiency" would be more properly named, "All Institutions Are Evil, Let's Eviscerate Them."

In this season we especially need leaders who are bold, prophetic, curious, compassionate and persevering, but in a context shaped by "they all lie / institutions are evil," those virtues take a hammering.

During the past 50 years, I've had the privilege of serving six different Reformed Christian institutions: two universities, two congregations, one high school and the Christian Reformed denomination. I've also had the privilege of having heart-to-heart conversations with hundreds of pastors, school administrators, teachers and other leaders in organizations like these, and heard firsthand about their joys (a little) and their sorrows (a lot).

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE

We need strong institutions led by strong leaders! I believe we are all called to do a great deal of soul-searching concerning how we engage with the institutions that are part of our Kingdom-seeking Reformed communities.

WHY DO WE NEED STRONG INSTITUTIONS? WHAT IS THEIR PURPOSE?

An institution exists to bring people together around a shared mission, in a spirit shaped by common values, guided by protocols that build capacity for the mission to flourish fruitfully. The many dimensions of the mission embedded in the Kingdom of God are supported by strong institutions.

When this goes well, leaders lead with sturdy character, wise discernment, appropriate transparency and judicious flexibility, all enlivened by the fruit of the Spirit. In turn, followers follow with trust, encouragement, support, constructive criticism and lively engagement.

THRIVING IS HARD

Thriving institutions are shaped by strong leadership and equally strong followership.

What are the specific dynamics that render "thriving" so difficult now?

Everyone is an expert; "followership" is a neglected spiritual discipline. The president of a Reformed university once said to me, "When one's position in an institution is higher up the ladder than others, it's like being the highest one on a mountain-climb. From that perch, one can see things that others cannot see. But the 'lower' ones don't know what they don't know, and thus don't realize they don't have as many facts in hand. And part of the loneliness of leadership is that I cannot responsibly share all the facts."

In our Google / AI age, everyone is now an expert. We all think we know all the facts, and in a climate of suspicion, our "facts" justify our refusal to trust leaders.

Fear is endemic. Over and over again leaders tell me how afraid they are, and how fear is rampant among their membership. Fear has become the primary fuel that drives community action and decision-making (or lack of decision-making). Covid has left many of our institutions financially fragile, and people know that money is power.

When communities are fuelled by fear, two sins easily take root: legalism and idolatry. Describing the presence of these sins in Reformed circles today would require a separate article. For now, identifying the pervasive presence of fear is enough. The deepest calling of Christian communities is to be places where love reigns, and fear is the great suffocator of love (I John 4:18).

Fear and suspicion fuel power-manipulation. Institutions wield power, and that's a good thing. One of the first commands the Lord gave his image-bearers was "to rule" (Gen. 1.28), and ruling in the Lord's name is a wonderful gift. The godly exercise of power is epitomized in Jesus washing his disciples' feet (John 13), and embodied in the Lord's declaration to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. 12: 9).

Many of our communities have seen groups mobilize behind the scenes to ensure that their agendas are successfully adopted at important decision-making gatherings such as classes, synods, school membership meetings, and more. Such power-manipulation undermines the deeper quality of the power of the gospel.

Perfection is not an option. The Reformed tradition includes a strong strain of perfectionism,

setting the bar high and then doing everything possible to reach that bar. That high bar has blessed us in many ways. But there's a dark side to it. In a highly dysfunctional environment like ours, setting a high bar creates a breeding ground for a critical spirit that undermines institutional health.

I have found that one of the most overlooked New Testament realities is its acceptance of slavery as a social/economic institution. Not only does the New Testament not condemn slavery, it actually gives guidance on how to be good slave owners and slaves (Eph. 6: 5-9 / Col. 3: 22-4:1). Frankly, that's crazy! Slavery is an incredibly evil practice, turning precious Image-bearers of God into things, mere property. This tells us that in broken situations, the best solutions are somewhat less broken, and perfection is not an option. Less broken solutions can create a feeding frenzy for the suspicious community of "follower-experts."

HOW TO DO BETTER

I could identify more dimensions of dysfunction, but this describes the landscape sufficiently for now. How might we handle this institutional environment in a God-honouring manner? I will risk naming a few "less-broken" thoughts.

Everyone is called to serve as a trust-shepherd. "Humpty-dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty-dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again." This child's rhyme expresses the fragility of trust better than any other poem I know. And yet Paul dares to write, "Love always trusts" (I Cor. 13: 7).

All of us – leaders and followers – are called to be trust-shepherds, stewards of the trust that is the lifeblood of institutions. Specifically, this means we give our leaders the benefit of the doubt, because they know more than we do. This means that we are curious, asking gentle questions, remembering that judgmentalism kills curiosity. Leaders serve as trust-shepherds by leading transparently and gently. Followers serve as trust-shepherds by rejecting political power-games. When they hear someone sowing seeds of suspicion and judgment, they shut it down before it gathers momentum and becomes toxic. Relationships are always more important than partisan agendas, and trust-shepherds tend relationships with great care.

One community I've worked with had a long history of conflict and suspicion. Recognizing this, they adopted a community covenant, which articulated the manner in which members of the community were called to

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treat one another. This covenant is read at the beginning of every meeting, and everyone in attendance commits to abiding by the covenant. When someone speaks in a manner that is not consistent with the covenant, the chair of the meeting asks that person to reword or withdraw their comments. I have seen firsthand profound trust-healing take place in this community. That covenant gives everyone permission to serve as a trust-shepherd.

Everyone supports our leaders' character development. There's an old saying that Christians are good at shooting their wounded. Every leader is wounded in some way. Values and character are central to institutional health. But here's the challenge: our leaders are called to be transparently vulnerable, but this makes them more susceptible to being wounded by the communities which they lead.

The model for embodying the heart of Christ in unusually difficult times is found in Jehoshaphat's response to an enemy invasion in II Chron. 20. He gathers the entire community and leads them in a prayer which includes these words: "We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are fixed on you." The entire chapter illustrates godly leadership and godly followership within the faithfulness of God.

Failure will happen; the Lamb still reigns. "Even though the wrong seems great and strong, God is the ruler yet." (from "This is my Father's world"). In our context, sin is having many "victories." Leaders are resigning or being fired. Fear-based legalism and idolatry are stronger than ever. Organized power blocs are achieving their goals. Superbly gifted leaders are telling me they will sit on the sidelines until the current season passes. I find myself praying over and over, "Dear Jesus, you are on the throne and we are not. Help us to trust in you." We will experience failures; Jesus is still Lord.

The three most repeated commands in Scripture are (in order), "Do not be afraid," "Love one another," and "Stand firm." This is the trio that our times drive us to cling to in both leadership and followership, embodying a trust that overcomes suspicion, a love that overcomes fear, and a standing-firm rootedness that overcomes power games.

Derek Schuurman

The March 2025 demolition of the former Grand Rapids headquarters of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, after the CRCNA downsized to smaller premises.

Syd Hielema

Syd is a retired professor and former director of CRC's Faith Formation Ministries. He's a dual U.S.-Canadian citizen who has spent most of his life in Canada and currently lives in Ancaster, Ont., where he serves as regional pastor for Classis Hamilton.

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OF DEATH AND PASCHA

Lisa Epp

WHAT PERSISTS

there is the void
there is the heavy immovable stone
there is a persisting and unbent state of rest
and unrest; there is a body remaining
along this straight and only line:
grief, erasure, forward and forever

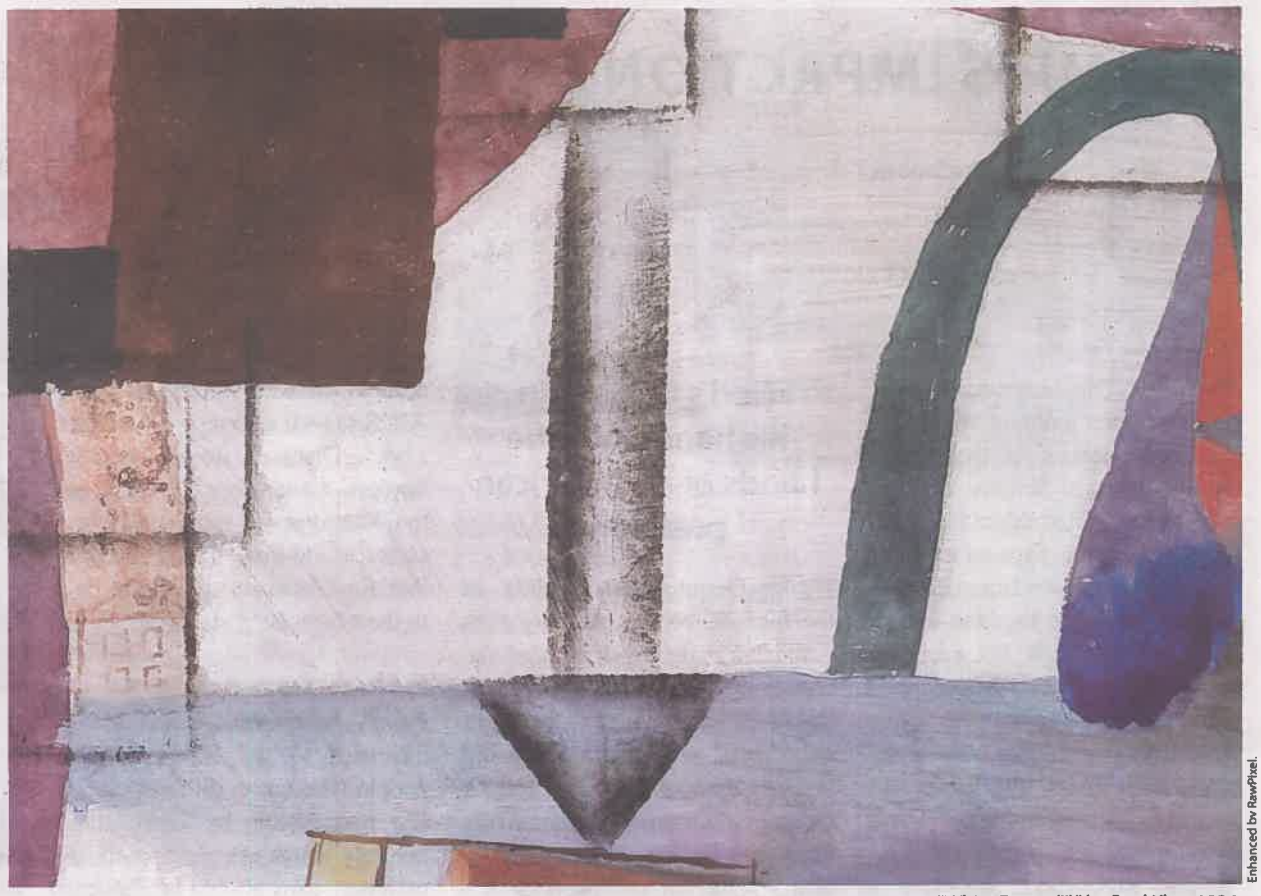
NEW WAYS

There is light that moves with holes in its hands.
There is a new day that walks with old scars.
There is the way that life was pierced and drained out
but that stands yet, alive, all anew.

These two stanzas are selected out of Epp's original, six-stanza poem.

Lisa Epp

Lisa is an emerging Canadian poet whose work has been published in the Capital City Press Anthology *(Volume IV) and who has performed works aloud at* Sounds from the Valley. *When she is not writing, she can usually be found enjoying time with her family and junior high school students in Edmonton, Alberta. To read more works by Lisa Epp, see lisaepp.ca.*



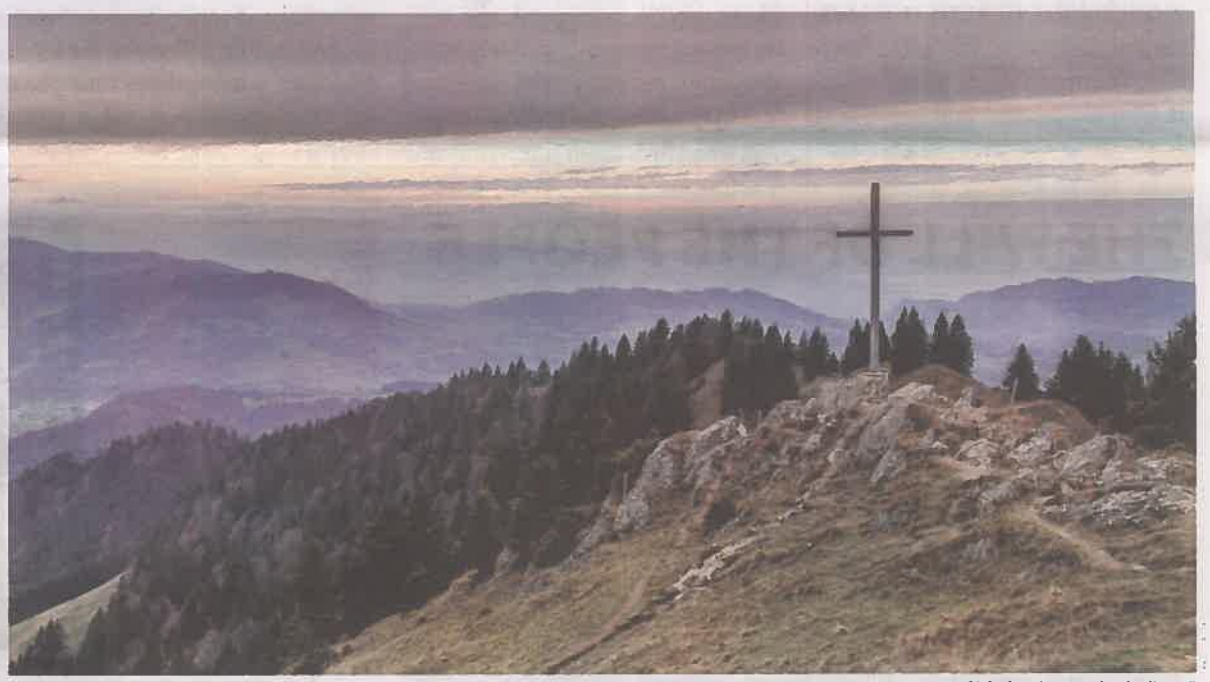
"White Easter (II)" by Paul Klee, 1924.

Enhanced by RawPixel.

DEO VOLENTE

Heidi VanderSlikke | *hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com*

Heidi lives in Mapleton Township, Ont. Her life and writing centre on faith, family and farm life.



"Justice and mercy," Heidi says, "intersect in the barbaric wooden beams, creating a new tree of life for those who believe."

BACK IN THE days of Gestetner machines and electric typewriters, I literally cranked out the bulletin for our small-town church. Many announcements, especially those on the weekly calendar, were punctuated by the letters *DV*. As a new Christian, I had no idea what that meant. The pastor kindly pointed me to James 4. We shouldn't boast about our plans for tomorrow. "Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will do this or that."

DV is the abbreviation for the Latin, *Deo volente* – Lord willing. It's a truth that proves itself time and again.

A few months ago, as Jack was heading off on another East Coast excursion, I planned glorious accomplishments in his absence. My lofty aspirations were completely derailed the night before his departure. I awoke around midnight with a queasy stomach. By daybreak my system was emptied and my energy completely drained.

Of course Jack can pack his own bags, but it isn't pretty. So I dragged myself to the closet down the hall and lugged a suitcase back to our room. I hoisted it onto the (unmade!) bed and flopped down beside it. With a pathetic moan I called out to Jack, "You're going to have to do this yourself."

> Remarkably, the planet kept on spinning.

"No problem!" he said, as he began yanking drawers open and tossing sundry items into the bag. I shuddered at the sight, but lacked the strength to criticize. The mound of clothing was twice as high as the suitcase.

"You can't close that," I said.

With a mighty grunt and a wry smirk, he forced the suitcase shut. "There," he said, triumphantly.

I spent the week sleeping 10 hours each night and taking long naps during the day. Remarkably, the planet kept on spinning. By the time Jack returned I felt nearly normal again. A lover of to-do lists, I should know by now that my TDL needs to be followed by *DV*. Apparently, it wasn't God's will for me to accomplish my plans that week. I have to admit – it didn't really matter. (In fact, I can't even remember what I had in mind.)

JUSTICE AND MERCY INTERSECT

The only One who makes his plans with no doubt of success is the Lord himself. I sometimes ponder the relationship between God's sovereignty and humanity's free will. Spurgeon said there's no need to reconcile the two – they are friends. Which leads me to consider the creation story.

Days of forming, days of filling, the Lord fashioned this marvelous home especially for us. He calls us the crown of creation. But all along he had to know (because he is omniscient) how this was going to work out. He alone could foresee our rebellion and the cost to redeem us. I can only conclude that salvation in Christ was no Plan B. All along it was *Deo volente*. Before we could eat from the tree of life he banished us from the garden, so that we wouldn't live forever in our fallen state.

As Lent unfolds into Resurrection Sunday I marvel at this mysterious choreography of the Lord's will revealed in the cross. Justice and mercy intersect in the barbaric wooden beams, creating a new tree of life for those who believe. Jesus himself is the firstfruits.

Isn't it amazing what the Lord is willing to do for us?

TRUMP'S IMPACT ON SCIENCE

Rudy Eikelboom | *roelof.eikelboom@ret.wlu.ca*

Rudy, who is largely apolitical but . . . , is the council chair at Waterloo Christian Reformed Church and is a retired Wilfrid Laurier psychology professor.

AS I WRITE THIS at the end of February, science journals are full of the consequences of the Trump administration's actions on science in the United States and elsewhere. With the pace of changes and the court cases launched, it is not clear what the situation will be when you read this, but whatever happens, the science landscape is being radically transformed. While American science has blessed the world with things like life-saving vaccines, taken us to the moon and given us the transistor and the integrated circuit on a chip, how it will emerge from Trump's changes remains to be seen.

God's world is in his hands, not the hands of an American president.

WORLDWIDE HEALTH THREATS

On the first day of his administration, Trump withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord and the World Health Organization (WHO). In the face of the Los Angeles fires – the latest demonstration of the consequences of our human-induced climate change – the "drill baby drill" president is choosing to make the world less safe for our children and grandchildren. While there has been remarkable progress on greener energy technologies, it appears this progress will be impeded going forward. The withdrawal from WHO makes it likely that the next pandemic will be noticed much more slowly, with dangerous consequences.

Next came defunding many agencies and programs supporting health and science worldwide. In the courts, people are fighting the order to defund the U.S. Agency for International Development, which supports programs to combat diseases like malaria and AIDS as well as drug trials to fight Ebola. Diseases do not respect borders (remember Covid?), so these actions will make us all less safe. In addition, many agencies that fund science are seeing cuts to their budgets and staffing.

MARGINALIZED, AGAIN

Finally, words matter, and Trump has tried to further marginalize people who are in difficult places, like trans youth, by saying there are only two sexes and that all use of other terms should be prevented. Apparently, even terminology like a "pregnant person" is not to be used. Alongside efforts to stamp out equity, diversity and inclusion programs, this will make the United States a more dangerous place for everyone who is not a white male. All this sounds like old efforts to make pi equal to three: God's world is just not this simple.

TIME TO SHOULDER UP

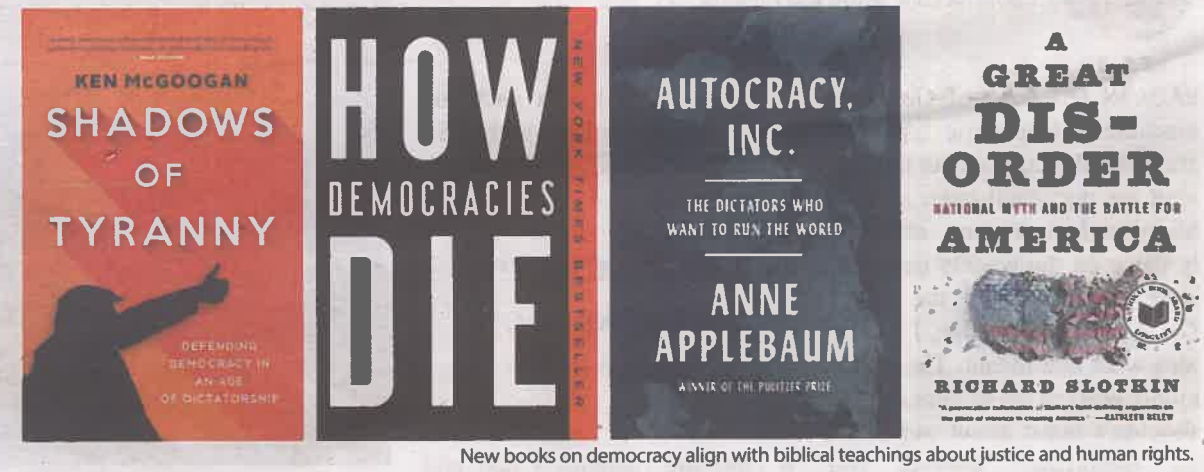
As Canadians, we can only watch from the sidelines, and there are other economic actions by Trump that our leaders are addressing. But this may be a good time to reverse the brain drain we have seen in the past and build up our scientific community in Canada. It may also be necessary to shoulder more responsibility for world and Canadian health by increasing our support of WHO and being more generous with our foreign aid.

As Christians, we should increase our efforts to welcome the stranger and protect the widow, those marginalized in Jesus' time. We must hold on to the truth about God's creation and recognize that God's world is in his hands, not the hands of an American president. As one of our doctrinal statements says, "Our world belongs to God."

THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

Kathy Vandergrift | *kathyvandergrift@rogers.com*

Kathy, a public policy analyst, brings experience in government, social justice work and a Master's Degree in Public Ethics to her reflections.



New books on democracy align with biblical teachings about justice and human rights.

WRITING ABOUT threats to democracy is no longer prophetic. The future of democracy is now a topic for coffee conversation and social media warfare. Words that are central to good governance are being hijacked to dismantle the very principles they represent. "Will of the people," for example, is used to claim legitimacy for whatever a leader says after a narrow margin of victory in an election with a low voter turn-out. It may only reflect the will of a small percentage of the people who are impacted by it. Actions that violate basic human rights and constitutions are justified as election mandates, just because an elected leader "says so." Global concern about democracy arises because there is evidence that elected governments are sliding into autocratic rule, led by strongmen who gain power and claim legitimacy through the ballot box.

HIJACKING DEMOCRACY

Declines in modern democracies range from slipping into autocracy (rule by one powerful person) or new oligarchies (rule by a group of powerful people) all the way to kleptocracy (using the powers of government for personal or business benefit). When power is obtained through the ballot box but then used to undermine the basic norms of democracy, it loses its legitimate authority. Resistance includes working to reform voting systems; it also needs to be much deeper and that is where Christians may have positive contributions to make.

DEMOCRACY 3.0

In the last six months I have read more than a dozen books about the future of democracy; some focus on the U.S., a few analyze how the Canadian context is different and a few are global. Weaknesses in many current democratic governing systems contribute to their increased vulnerability to manipulation and exploitation. What strikes me in the commentaries is a common theme across different perspectives and contexts when it comes to the future of democracy. If it survives, Democracy 3.0 will be a thicker, more robust version that goes beyond the reform of voting systems, which is also important. What strikes me even more is this: the direction of the deeper reforms that are now suggested by many writers on democracy align with biblical teachings about justice and creating conditions for the flourishing of all people.

The current awareness that democracy and good governance are fragile presents opportunities. Citizens can play an important role in reforms to build more robust democracies. Respect for the basic human rights of all people, including minority groups, needs enforcement through robust mechanisms that are above party politics. To prevent the concentration and potential abuse of power, citizens can insist on processes that provide checks and balances, and speak up against unfounded attacks on public servants and experts who speak truth to power. Within society, generous accommodation of deep differences can enrich the search for meaning by every person and allow more people to see themselves inside our governing systems, instead of feeling alienated as outsiders. The first step is awareness that we can no longer take democracy and good governance for granted.

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE GARDEN

After the city, the garden
is quiet, the leaves green
enough to absorb every cry.

This isn't the first garden.
This isn't the first cool evening.
We've been somewhere similar
before.

The garden wends its way toward
sleep, the flowers
close their dusty fingers, shut their
eyes.

The sounds of the city can hardly
climb the garden wall.

I do not know which to prefer:
the silence of an ending
or the silence of enduring,
rest at dusk or waiting for dawn.

Is there water here in the garden?
A fountain, a stream?
I am hearing water
The continuing wash even now as
it darkens
The continuing wash against the
riven shore.

Guard sounds like garden but these
men look out of place.

Who nests in this garden? Wren,
reed warbler, crane?
Crow or kingfisher?
What flash, there by the water?
Then doubled on the surface, what
dives down, comes clean, and
again,
again can fly?

In the dark, these men
light cigarettes, lean against the
blocking stone
while all around them in the garden
shadows, there are
other stones and other men,
sleeping.

Who belongs here? Who can own
a garden?
Who could be old enough or young
to claim it?
What key might keep the breathing
life at bay?
The night waits in steady rhythm,
knowing no more
than what we know.

The women who watch the stars
turn now inside,
wrap spices in clean white cloths,
small wallets to carry in baskets
tomorrow
back to the garden for him.

At the sight of the kingfisher flying
in the garden light
every stone in the stone city would
cry out a name.

It will be morning soon in this
second garden. Morning first
and then the day
to follow.

Katie Munnik

Katie is an Ottawa writer living in Cardiff with her spouse and three growing children. You can also find Katie on X @messy_table.

"Parting Gold" by John Visser, 2023 (oil on canvas). Used with permission. Willock and Sax Gallery.

This poem was inspired by Wallace Steven's poem, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird". As we watch new life emerge in our gardens this Spring, we also remember the garden tomb in Jerusalem and the evenings and nights after the crucifixion and before the morning of resurrection. Like every garden, that garden was a place of rest and growth, of decay and new life. With Easter we see that this rhythm only foreshadowed what was to come: the reversal of death and the rising of Life eternal.

WHY ACCOUNTABILITY MATTERS

Sara Pot | *thepotfamily@gmail.com*

The Pot family story includes a life of caregiving for daughters Rachel and Janneke.

ON A MONDAY afternoon in early March, my nurse and I took Rachel and Janneke to a doctor's office in Hamilton. Most of the girls' care over the years has taken place at McMaster Children's Hospital, but now that Rachel is officially an adult, and Janneke is 16 years old, we are slowly transitioning to other care providers.

TIME FOR A WORKOUT

We arrived at the address and searched for parking. I drive a large Sprinter van with a lift that, when activated, extends out the side door. This means I need a wide accessible spot. We were able to eventually secure street parking only to have our attention drawn to the entrance. A concrete ramp was visible next to a set of stairs, but oddly enough, the door to the office was only in front of the stairs. This meant I had to push each girl quickly up the ramp, so as to gain speed, and then take a quick right and quick left, while leaning on the back of the chair to overcome the additional height of the doorway's threshold. It would also require someone to open the front door (no automatic option) so we could land forward in the small foyer instead of backwards down the stairs. Experiences like these are why I don't bother joining a local gym for calisthenics.

> Many individuals impacted by disability have daily experiences with poorly modified public and private spaces.

It was a decent visit, all things considered. The doctor was gentle with each girl and apologetic about the physical barriers. He explained, wisely, that we would do the next appointment via phone. As we drove home that afternoon, the nurse and I wondered how on earth an adult without an attendant might navigate that office.

IS ANYONE LISTENING?

The word "accountability" comes to mind. Many individuals impacted by disability have daily experiences with poorly modified public and private spaces. Though complaints are registered, petitions are distributed and frustration is shared via social media, often change happens slowly or not at all. Who is held accountable?

At the time this column is published, Canada will have heard the results of the discussion with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities regarding our country's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Countries and civil society organizations share reports with the CRPD Committee about how they're putting the CRPD into action. Then, they all engage in conversation to talk through what's working and what's not. Afterward, the Committee gives feedback and advice – called Concluding Observations – to help countries improve. From there, countries work on those recommendations, and the whole review process starts over again to keep things moving forward.

This international dialogue is so important, but I worry it's being lost in current news cycles. There's something powerful and enabling about the idea of countries working together to hold each other accountable for protecting the rights and dignity of people with disabilities, ensuring their full and equal enjoyment of all human rights. May we persist.

THE END OF THE WORLD?

Matthijs Kronemeijer | *mkronemeijer+cc@gmail.com*

Matthijs lives in Toronto with his wife Brenda and daughter Lydia. Although he identifies as a Roman Catholic, he mostly attends Willowdale Christian Reformed Church.

AMERSFOORT USED to be the city we'd see from the train, my brother and I, as we travelled home for the weekend during our student days. It was the last stop of the fast "intercity" trains from Utrecht before they passed through the Veluwe forests to arrive at Zwolle. There, we would run to catch a diesel train from the 1950s to the small town of Kampen where our parents lived. The train tracks ended at Kampen; it felt a bit like the modern world ended there too.

What does one do when the world seems to end? The poet Heinrich Heine once joked that if the world ended he would move to the Netherlands, because there everything always happened 50 years later. Needless to say, that was not our reason for moving to Amersfoort, where I live temporarily with Brenda and Lydia thanks to the exceptional generosity of friends. If the world has not ended by July, or some other major event intervened, we will be moving back to Toronto then.

The city of Amersfoort does not look or feel like the world is ending soon. It is a perfect place to rediscover the Netherlands: a new and yet familiar city to explore, still close to family, and lots of opportunities for children. Lydia is having a wonderful adventure. Her parents, well, we continue to be affected by world and church news, and all the doom it seems to spell, but still there is so much to appreciate and be thankful for.

Brenda Kronemeijer Heyink

"The city of Amersfoort," Matthijs writes, "does not look or feel like the world is ending soon."

BY COMPARISON

Is there anywhere to go when the world seems to end? No. Still, moving away helps to get a sense of how things change. For example, I noticed that the city of Toronto has not moved along with the times nearly as well as Amersfoort. Toronto may not be 50 years behind as in Heine's joke, but its subway, parks, roads, playgrounds and public infrastructure show the signs of years of neglect. Precious landmarks are closed or destroyed, such as St Anne's Anglican church and the Ontario Science Center. Ever more one-bedroom condo buildings, of the kind that are good for investment (supposedly) but not for families, clog Toronto's skies. There is a pattern here, and as a European lover of good government, I do not like it.

Being here, we also realize that Toronto has many things we are thankful for and dearly miss, mostly our church and Christian school communities. Both respond to American cultural pressure and political ideologies but in a distinctively Canadian way. They may be the beginning of something new and good.

TIME TO GET ORGANIZED

Moving between countries has helped me see the negative forces that are at work across western societies. The ideas that motivate them are still not well enough understood, but are coming into focus. In Canada the damage is more clearly visible than elsewhere, but there is no better place than Canada to observe and figure out what is going wrong south of the border, not just in politics but also in the church. Since the world is not likely to end before some of us get organized to take ownership, it is about time to start doing that.

HEY GOD, HOW ABOUT A MIRACLE?

Bob Bruinsma | *bruinsmabob@gmail.com*

Bob lives with his wife, Louisa, three children and three grandsons in Edmonton, AB (though, thankfully, not all in the same house!).

Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me?" (2 Kings 20:8)

KING HEZEKIAH was seriously sick when the prophet Isaiah came to tell him to set his house in order because he would soon die. Hezekiah was heartbroken and cried to God for more time. God sent Isaiah back to Hezekiah to tell him, "OK, God has seen your tears and will give you another 15 years." Hezekiah said, "How can I be sure that God will do this? How about a miraculous sign from God, please."

God humours Hezekiah and tells Isaiah to give him a choice of miracles. "Ask him," says God, "Whether he would like to have the sun's shadow move forward ten steps on the dial of Ahaz or retreat 10 steps."

"Well," says Hezekiah, "It's normal for the shadow to lengthen 10 intervals; rather let the shadow retreat 10 intervals" (vs. 10). Isaiah prays to the Lord, who then brings the sun's shadow back ten intervals on the dial.

> Without God's moment-by-moment sustaining care of creation, it would disappear into nothingness.

And we tend to agree with Hezekiah. What kind of a sign would it be for the sun's shadow to simply proceed as it always does? Why in the world would God offer Hezekiah a choice between the ordinary movement of the sun, and an extraordinary retrograde movement instead? We'd choose for the latter sign as well, wouldn't we?

I'm not sure, of course, but I think that God would have been pleased had Hezekiah chosen to see the sun's usual course across the sky as a daily miracle in itself. But that's just ordinary isn't it?

'ORDINARY' CREATION?

Your heart beats about 70 times per minute, which is 4,200 times per hour, and 100,800 times per day, and 36,288,000 times per year. In your lifetime your heart will beat about 2.5 billion times. During that time, it will have pumped the equivalent of about 206 million liters of blood throughout your body.

A human egg cell is about .12 mm in diameter. That's about the same size as the period at the end of this sentence. A human sperm cell is about 10,000 times smaller than an egg cell. During fertilization, these two cells get together and start growing to eventually form a human baby that has about 26 billion cells at birth. (By the way, it would take you about 34 years to count to a billion at one count per second.)

Like Hezekiah, we get used to 'ordinary' miracles.

I could go on and on with countless other examples of the miraculous splendors of creation, but you get my point. Creation itself is an astounding miracle. The fact that there is something rather than nothing is miraculous. Without God's moment by moment sustaining care of creation it would disappear into nothingness. And the greatest miracle is that God so loved creation that she gave her only son to save it (including us) for eternity. Praise God for the (ordinary?) miracle of Creation!

THANK GOD FOR CIVIL SERVANTS

Curt Gesch | *cgesch63@gmail.com*

Curt is a farmer and writer living in Quick, B.C. He is a writer on environmental and agricultural topics.

I'VE MADE MY share of jokes about civil servants who don't seem to be working hard. My grandfather, a very quiet and non-judgemental man, started me off thinking about this. We were driving down County Road G near Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, and some employees of the township were repairing the road. Grandpa pulled over and said (out of his window) to Herb, one of the workers and Grandpa's long-time acquaintance: "Herb, you have a sign on the road back a bit that tells a lie." When Herb looked puzzled Grandpa said in a deadpan, wry voice: "The sign says MEN WORKING, but I see you just leaning on your shovel."

Road workers nowadays in my area of B.C. are almost all employees of companies that have maintenance contracts; the switch to contracted-out maintenance was supposed to save a lot of money but the only study I found showed absolutely no savings from contracting-out. We're more likely to run into civil servants in government office buildings in the town of Smithers.

I could tell you stories about civil service office workers who don't seem to be able to help me with my inquiries and problems. But I could also tell you lots of others.

The biologist who patiently answers my questions about why Round Lake fishing is so poor (it's a eutrophic lake) and who points out the efforts made to improve it by stocking bigger fingerlings of a more aggressive trout species to compete with the non-game species.

The agrologist who helped another friend (a farmer) with the application process to gain a grant for improved machinery and who solicits advice from me even though I am anything but a "full-time" farmer.

The retired government biologist who donates a great deal of her time to helping with environmental improvements in the area.

The area highway supervisor who saw to it that a road maintenance problem was dealt with by the contractor after I called about it.

The health workers who provide care for my friends and me!

The teachers who encourage students to learn from us oldsters in a continuing education program at the local public school (and thanks us with homemade jams and jellies!).

The aides for political representatives who direct us to resources, schedule appointments with the MLAs and MPs, and who take notes on our concerns so they are dealt with.

The local mayor and village/town council members who basically donate their time and talents

Istock

to the functioning of their communities – they receive at most a pittance.

DESERVING OF RESPECT

I could go on. While all the people in my examples are not perhaps technically civil servants, they all are supported through taxation in one way or another. And they don't lean on shovels. They are people who deserve respect for their work in systems where often they are prevented by computerization, down-sizing and a sort of bureaucratic emasculation from taking direct action themselves to help fellow-citizens.

What prompted my thoughts was a statement by Elon Musk in the USA in which he stated that "Hitler didn't murder millions of people. Public sector employees did." That's not only a lie but a cheap shot from a person who has been harming people in his businesses and pseudo-governmental actions by summarily dismissing them and insulting their competence.

I suppose you could say that Elon Musk did me a service, however. His dishonest nastiness prompted me to rethink how I am often not thankful for the many people in government sector employment who make my life better. Thank God for them. I hope Herb wasn't hurt too badly by Grandpa's comment. Herb was actually waiting for a gravel truck to arrive, so he could fill in a pothole.

HAVE YOU HEARD THE JOKE ABOUT THE BOARD?

Darren Roorda | *roordadarren@gmail.com*

Darren is President of Shepherd Consulting focusing on creating healthy organizational leadership, especially in not-for-profit and Christian communities (schools, churches and charities).

A PASTOR, consultant and governance expert walk into the board room of a Christian organization and ask, "What kind of board are you?"

The board answers: "We are a Policy Board, or at least we are trying to be."

If it were a joke, it would be a bad one. There's no punch line. But it's not a joke. It's actually a large part of my occupational life. Whether it is a Christian charity, church, or school, 99 percent of the time the question, "What kind of board are you?", is answered excitedly, "We practice Policy Governance!"

POLICY ABOVE ALL

It seems like among our Christian circles, leadership has lifted Policy Governance to the level of the Ten Commandments: we shall practice it according to the methods developed by John Carver in the late 1970s and early 1980s! Carver formally introduced the model in a book published in 1990, *Boards That Make a Difference*. His framework was designed to provide a systematic and principle-driven approach to board governance, emphasizing clarity in roles, accountability and strategic leadership.

It's good, but if that is the only thing the board is doing, it's an organizational and missional handcuff.

Thirty years of watching Christian charities espousing Policy Governance has led me to see a recurring problem: disengaged boards and board members. The consequence of disengaged boards are ministries that do not grow. The system is blocked up and backed up when Executive Directors and boards only look for a policy adaptation or answer to every particular challenge, problem, or strategic path. And even if they're not creating a policy, they are certainly reluctant to become proactive about key issues or challenges. "Better to write a policy, pass all productive efforts to staff, or commit something to prayer rather than create and execute a plan we participate in," they say.

PROACTIVELY ADAPT

There is growing evidence, first propelled by Harvard's Chait, Ryan and Taylor in Governance as Leadership (2005), that the best boards are adaptive. Sometimes they are hands-on (Operational), sometimes they act strategically (Generative) and yes, sometimes they write policy and procedures (Policy). They take on any of the three forms of governance appropriate to the need.

Created with DALL-E March 10

Does your Board over-focus on policies?

The real key is to know when to do which behaviour. (Perhaps more on that in future issues.)

THE EARLY CHURCH

Want biblical proof that good leadership does more than concern itself with policy? Look to the early church in Jerusalem. Sometimes, they speak of theological matters (circumcision or not?). Sometimes, they understand their context and appoint leaders (the creation of deacons in Acts 6). And sometimes, leadership simply went out and planted churches or carried out evangelism. Leadership was not stuck in the management of policy and procedure.

For those of you who are both Christian and serving in a board or council environment, the above may be new to you. Your organization has always touted Policy Governance as if it is the only responsible behaviour. But consider your board members. They got involved likely because they are passionate about the ministry and wanted to be highly engaged. So set them free to use their gifts! Diversify your board to include people with expertise in a variety of areas and let them go to work in a supervised way that supports the staff and ministry you are equipped by God to propel.

A board that can adapt and enable life-giving plans is the goal. That is the kind of board that multiplies things 30, 60 or 100 fold (Matt. 13:8, Mark 4:8 and Luke 8:8).

No joke.

COPING WITH POLITICAL STRESS

Jennifer Bowen

Sponsored Content: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the organization and do not necessarily represent the editorial perspective of Christian Courier.

I recently heard someone say: "If you're not anxious, you're not paying attention." While political conflict and tension are always present, many believe we are living through a historic moment that will make for some riveting reading in future history books.

You may notice yourself feeling more stressed after listening to the radio or scrolling through social media. You may be facing increased conflict in relationships with family, friends and your church. It's essential for us to find effective ways to ground ourselves in our faith, maintain perspective and cultivate peace within ourselves and in our relationships.

FEELINGS ARE PROPORTIONATE

God has created our bodies with a wonderful (though sometimes frustrating) built-in alarm system that alerts us to danger or uncertainty.

So if you're distressed, it's likely because something important to you is being challenged. If you care deeply about peacemaking, freedom, safety, kindness or respect, it's painful to see those values violated in the news, or witness places where those values are being taken away. The more you care, the more it hurts when things go wrong. And that's okay – it means you hold deep and meaningful values.

SIGNS OF POLITICAL STRESS

Political stress can manifest in many ways, including:

- Feeling anxious, low, exhausted or helpless about the future and the direction of society;
- Having strained relationships with friends, family, or colleagues due to polarized viewpoints;
- Losing a sense of belonging or support when your views conflict with those of close friends or family;

FAITH AND STABILITY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

When this happens, it is essential to find your anchor, remembering what is most important to you. As Christians, we reach for our faith – God is our Rock where we find shelter in the storm. Each of us expresses our faith a bit differently, and during stressful times, we seek God differently. Some of us cling to prayer, some of us long to meet God in nature, and others of us find God through sacred traditions at the altar. Have you considered your preferred way of seeking God? We need God's eternal perspective.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH POLITICAL STRESS

1. Limit media exposure

Our phones are often at arm's reach, and our media feed is eager to call our attention to the 24-hour news cycle's noisy loops. While it is important to stay informed, please consider being kind to yourself by setting boundaries around media consumption. Consider:

- Choosing 1-2 trusted news sources rather than "doom-scrolling" through endless news feeds.
- Taking regular breaks and set time limits for news consumption and social media, such as checking updates once or twice a day.

2. Use your spiritual tools

The Bible captures God's hope in the face of pain and lament. These times of uncertainty are opportunities to dive into our faith. Try to deepen these spiritual practices:

- Begin and end each day with prayer, asking for wisdom, discernment and peace.
- Pull out your favourite passages of the Bible that bring hope, or revisit a favourite Spiritual writing that comforts you.
- Consider joining a small group, go on a spiritual retreat, or meet with a mentor or friend who fosters hope.

3. Focus on what you can control

Feeling powerless is a major contributor to political stress. While we cannot control everything happening in the world, we can take meaningful action in our own spheres of influence.

- Consider volunteering or supporting local non-profits you care about.
- Encourage respectful, solution-oriented discussions rather than divisive arguments. Enter into conversations with the goal of listening and understanding.

4. Strengthen relationships and find support

Political differences can strain even the closest relationships. These strategies can be helpful in both building peace and finding meaningful support:

- Prioritize relationships over political debates. Not every conversation needs to be an argument.
- Seek common ground and shared values where possible. Your family may disagree on political parties but agree on universal health care.
- If you have someone close to you who brings you joy, make them a priority.
- If conflict or isolation feels overwhelming, consider reaching out to a counsellor or a trusted faith leader for support.

5. When possible, laugh

In the mental health field, there is a long-held value placed on humour in the midst of pain. Engaging in comedy, humour and silliness can be both an act of defiance in times of stress as well as a means of relief for our bodies and minds.

When we laugh, God built us to feel the benefits of increased oxygen and endorphins (our bodies' painkillers). Neurologically, this pulls us out of fight or flight mode. Pediatric wards have long known this, using clown therapy with cancer patients. Humour is not ignoring the reality of the stressors, but resisting being overcome by them.

6. Prioritize self-care and mental health

Just as your car requires regular oil changes, your body and mind require attention. Often misunderstood as indulgent, self-care more accurately describes activities that ensure your mind, body and spirit are in good working order, and it needs to be scaled to fit your present stress.

- Engage in regular physical activity, deep breathing, journaling or spending time in nature. Each is a significant stress reliever for your body and mind.
- Make time for activities that bring you joy – they impact both mind and body in very restorative ways. Consider past hobbies due for a renaissance.

GATHERING

We were not immersed in today's political stress when Shalem began planning this Spring's Ministry Mental Health Summit; however, we knew it would be needed. At Shalem, we know churches, Christian Schools and organizations are feeling the effects of this crisis. We've designed this Spring's summit as a time to be equipped, encouraged and inspired, bringing hope to our communities. We have invited wise voices to lead us, including Kay Warren, John Swinton, Curt Thompson, Hilary McBride and Dan Whitehead, each bringing a unique lens, making this a dynamic gathering.

Consider joining us on May 20-22 at Tyndale in Toronto – we'd love to have you be part of the conversation! (See shalem-network.org/events for more).

MOVING FORWARD WITH HOPE AND RESILIENCE

Though the world may feel increasingly uncertain, we are not easily broken. God has built us with an incredible capacity to cope, even through high stress. While it takes some careful intentionality, loved ones, community, self-care and faith, we can navigate through this next chapter together, co-creating hope in our hearts and in our world.

Jennifer Bowen is the Executive Director at Shalem Mental Health Network. The development of an early draft of this article and resource list was supported by AI.

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ANNIVERSARY

KWANTES, Matt & Dorothy

1965 April 20 2025

With gratitude to God for his faithfulness and grace, we celebrate the 60th anniversary of Matt & Dorothy Kwantes (nee Hamstra).

With much love from your children and grandchildren: Cindy & Dave (Naomi), Heather & Tim (Stephanie & Zac, Kyle, Mairin), James (Evan, Lauren), and Dianne (Olivia, Francesca, Miriella).

Matthew 6:33 - *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Best wishes can be sent to #19, 33123 George Ferguson Way, Abbotsford, BC, V2S 2L6 or to kwantesmd@shaw.ca

JOBS

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BFM Foundation Canada is a national organization with over 50 thrift stores across Canada. The net revenue from all Mission Thrift Stores is devoted to the Joint Ministry of BFM Foundation Canada and Bible League Canada. These funds are used by Bible League Canada to establish adult literacy programs, church planter training, children's ministry initiative and the distribution of Bibles in almost 50 countries worldwide.

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OBITUARIES

ENSERINK, Willemina Johanna

Passed away at West Lincoln Memorial Hospital, Grimsby, ON on Friday, February 14, 2025, in her 97th year. Willemina Johanna Enserink was born on January 31, 1929, in Harfsen, the Netherlands. The tenth of thirteen children born to Gerrit Jan Marinus and Johanna Hermina (Hietkamp) Enserink, Willemina grew up at "De Huurne," their family's homestead.

The family's experiences during WWII had a powerful impact during her teenage years with her family's involvement in the Underground and their farm being damaged by a German V1 rocket. Wil was a resilient woman who freely reflected the love of God to others.

KAMPHUIS, Hendrik Jan (John)

Passed away at Shalom Manor, on Monday, March 3, 2025, in his 98th year. Hendrik Jan (John) Kamphuis was born on June 1, 1927, in Eefde, Holland. He was the 7th of 15 children born to Hendrikus and Berendina (Menkveld) Kamphuis. His experiences as a teenager during WWII and later as part of the Dutch Army serving in Indonesia profoundly influenced who he was as a person. Throughout his life, Jan's positive outlook and his "God has blessed us so richly" mindset, was a witness to God's goodness, in both good and challenging times.

Wil and Jan started their relationship in 1946 and they exchanged more than 500 letters while Dad served in Indonesia for 2 1/2 years. On Jan 18, 1952, they were married, and in July of 1953, they emigrated to PEI, Canada with their 6-month-old son, Hank. While on PEI, Mom and Dad's gift for hospitality was put to great use hosting many new immigrants and individuals, stretching meagre provisions to accommodate all who came. Years later, one of those new immigrants described Mom as PEI's version of the Statue of Liberty, welcoming all with a plate of cookies in one hand and a board game in the other! Mom was an active organizer in Ladies Aid, Women's Institute, Red Cross, 4-H, Vacation Bible School, church groups and many more organizations. Through dedicated study, Jan went from his training as a baker, to head of a dietary department, to administrator of a Home for the Aged. During these years, Gerald, Joanne, John, Bernadine, Wilma, Tony and Christina were born.

In 1979, Jan and Wil felt called to help set up Shalom Manor, a Christian Nursing Home in Grimsby, Ontario where Dad worked as administrator for 14 years and Mom created the "Shalom Shares" publication. Dad was known by all as "Vader Jan" and continued as a faithful volunteer there after his retirement. Many residents eagerly looked forward to his upbeat visits. He loved to minister to the elderly by singing and praying with them. As a leader, Jan was well loved. He was personable and connected genuinely with others, whether they were supervisors, colleagues or part of the staff. Servant-hearted Jan and Wil had a gentle, accepting way about them and this, coupled with a good sense of humour, made them a couple whose company was easy to enjoy.

Their grandchildren found Opa and Oma's home to be an open and welcoming place where each of them was treasured. Their grandchildren recall fondly Oma's times of uncontrollable laughter and Opa's good-natured "cheating" when they played games. Oma's "Dutch Knitting Club" and Christmas cookie gatherings with granddaughters were legendary.

Jan and Wil were the loved parents of Hank Kamphuis (Valerie), Gerald Kamphuis (Jane), Joanne McIsaac (Alan), John Kamphuis (Heather), Bernadine Gerrits (late Klaas), Wilma Harris (Ted), Tony Kamphuis (Ruth Ann) and Christina Bezemer (William).

They were the cherished Oma and Opa of Matthew (Lacy), Nick (Bethany Trainor), Mitchell, Amber Paglia; Alissa Kamphuis (Tyler Trainor), Marty (Dani), Kris (Dorothy), Anthony; Andrew McIsaac (Martine), Joshua McIsaac (Faith), Stephen McIsaac, Michael McIsaac (Emily); Andrea Hearn (Jamie), Carolyn McCarville (Nick); Rachel Koughan (Trevor), Isaac Gerrits (Emily), Hannah Gerrits (Jonathan Authier); Amanda Zorn (Charles), Brent Harris (Lauren), Kelly Harris Van Beilen (Nate), Mitchell Harris (Hayley Fallesen); Calvin, John, Alexandra Weinhardt (Andrew); Kyle Bezemer (Michelle Marano), Tallia VanGeest (Peter), Shannon De Boer (Brady), Makenna Thiessen (Kyle), Sophia Bezemer (Samuel Cross) and 39 Great Grandchildren.

James 3:13 asks *Who is wise and understanding among you? He should show his works by good conduct with wisdom's gentleness.* This describes perfectly our Vader Jan and Moeder Wil – devoted spouses, loving parents, loving Opa & Oma and Birdie Opa and Oma, dedicated Church members and most importantly, beloved Children of God.

KENNEDY, Wilhelmina

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of Wilhelmina Margaretha Kennedy (nee de Groot), a wife, mother, grandmother and great grandmother who left this world to be in heaven with God, on January 16, 2025, at the age of 91.

Wilhelmina was born on June 18, 1933 in the Netherlands and came from a family immersed in art and music, which had a lifelong impact on her. Her father was the curator of the Mauritshuis Museum, which was also their home, and her mother was a professional classical singer. At the age of 19, she left Den Haag with her family in 1952 to start anew in Canada, where she met her husband, Bert, who was also from Den Haag.

At the age of 49 Wilhelmina attended the Ontario College of Art, graduating with a Fine Arts degree and continued her studies in Art History at McMaster University. She went on to teach many students a love for art including her 8 grandchildren. Wilhelmina's faith was prominently displayed in many of her paintings and church banners. Painting landscapes, still-lifes and later abstract work, was her passion.

Her work can be found hanging in many homes and public places such as Redeemer University. Wilhelmina was a vibrant member of her church and community and instrumental in inaugurating the Colborne Art Gallery, and organizing many art shows there.

Her other great love was God's creation, whether camping in Killarney or walking in her local forest, now to be donated in her memory to Northumberland Land Trust and known as Wilhelmina Woods.

She lives on in the memories of her children, Robert (Freda), Peter (Arlene), Helen and her 8 grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held in April at St. Mark's Anglican Church, Port Hope.

EVENT

LIBERATION OF EUROPE CELEBRATION

Eighty years ago The Netherlands was liberated by Canadian soldiers of the Allied armies, ending five years of NAZI oppression. Come and celebrate V.E. Day with song! Singers from the North Lakeshore Chorus will perform anthems, popular songs of the era and beautiful choral pieces at Fellowship CRC in Brighton at 2:00 PM, Saturday June 7th. Mark your calendars! Cost is $20. Children under twelve and war veterans attend for free. There is room for experienced S.A.T.B. singers to join our nine day Liberation of The Netherlands Anniversary Tour from June 27th to July 6th . Contact Michael Korn michaelkorn@sympatico.ca or call 416-282-0427 for more information.

VACATION

Holiday accommodation in Holland with vehicle rentals and tours.
chestnutlane.nl

RENTALS

COTTAGE RENTAL

2-bedroom cottage available for rent on quiet lake, for select summer and fall months, one hour north of Kingston. Please contact cad.huyer@gmail.com for information.

EMPTY COUNCIL ROOMS

Of CRC members in Canada surveyed, 62% will no longer sign the Covenant for Officebearers.

Angela Reitsma Bick

iStock.

SPRING IS NOMINATION SEASON, that time of year when church councils thank retiring members and count empty seats to see how many new officebearers are needed. This spring, however, it might be harder than usual to find members ready to take on a leadership role at church – at least if *Christian Courier*'s survey results are any indication. That's because decisions made at Synod 2024 are having an impact not only on the future of the denomination as a whole but on local churches. Relatively quickly, council rooms are going to lose anyone who will not sign the Covenant for Officebearers (CFO) annually. What does this mean for local Christian Reformed Church (CRC) councils in the future? Who will be serving, and who has been pushed out the door?

"Office bearers in the CRCNA are now required to align within synodical rulings on confessionally defined unchastity, which exclude persons in same-sex relationships from full participation." That was the introduction to Question 8 on *CC*'s survey. "Based on this change," we asked, "would you sign the Covenant for Officebearers on a yearly basis?" Sixty-two percent of our 1,199 respondents said 'No,' 28 percent said 'Yes,' and 10 percent said, 'Not sure.' I went through 691 comments tacked on to this question and analyzed them for patterns within those answers. While a solid majority among those in support of signing the CFO stated their support of the denomination (71 comments), more than double that (162 comments) among those who will not sign expressed frustration at Synod's "overreach" and "forced conformity." Even those who say they agree with the Human Sexuality Report are not keen on how the CFO has been repurposed. Below the surface, a spirit of rebellion seems to be quietly simmering among Canadian members of the Christian Reformed Church. And a handful of people were openly subversive: "My gifts are needed on church council," one person who chose 'yes' said, "and I am prepared to lie on a form in order to ensure our local church has leadership."

'WE CANNOT SIGN'

Out of our 1,199 participants, 745 said they will not sign the CFO going forward – a number that should concern current Council Chairs. I sorted 458 comments from this group into five categories. The largest proportion, as mentioned, were those who took issue with Synod's process. "This decision lacks integrity in how it came to pass," one person wrote, while another said, "Synod is not the final arbiter of how God leads his people." It's "not Christian Reformed to leave no room for doubt," a few declared. Just over 100 comments said they could not sign the CFO as it conflicts with their affirming stance or because "God calls us to love everyone equally." Two smaller groups, roughly 80 comments each, said that they refuse to sign because unchastity should not have been made confessional and because to do so would go against their conscience. Lastly, five percent objected to how "focusing on homosexuality creates a hierarchy of sins. Why tie salvation to one 'sin'?" One person was blunt: "Synod's decision makes me want to vomit," while another admitted, "I would not become an office bearer because I don't have the energy to deal with this." The most memorable objection to Synod's annual signing requirement was the man who said, "I only signed my marriage license once. I'm still committed to my wife. Why do I need to do more for the church?"

'WE WILL STILL SIGN'

Three hundred and forty survey respondents (28 percent) indicated that 'Yes,' they will still sign the CFO, for three main reasons. The largest group here was clear that they support decisions made by the CRCNA and value the Reformed confessions (71 comments). "I have zero issue with any of our creeds and confessions," one person wrote, while another said, "as a member of the CRC, I follow its principles." The second group (59 comments) said they support Synod's decisions "because homosexuality is a sin, plain and simple" and specified that the CRC's position is "biblical" and "God's will." "This has always been the case for the majority of Christians and in Christian history," one person pointed out. Lastly, the denomination must not capitulate to what "Canadian society finds acceptable" or permit "theological drift;" the CFO is necessary, according to this group, because Canadian culture is getting it wrong.

ON THE FENCE

Ten percent – 114 people – said they weren't sure whether or not they'd sign the Covenant in the future. "I am theologically conservative and pastorally affirming," one person wrote. That tension is not new, according to this comment: "All of us have at one time or another questioned or doubted some positions."

SMALL REBELLIONS

To address that concern, the CRCNA sent out a document called "Guidance on the Meaning of 'Affirming the Confessions'" to all churches this winter. "Synod 2024 did not aim to close off every question that might naturally arise in the life of faith," it says. "Wondering" is valid but not "permanent disagreement or settled conviction contrary to a doctrine contained in the confessions or a confessional interpretation."

While some people might appreciate that nuance, it's not enough for the survey respondents who picked 'Yes' and made it clear that they are signing under duress: "In order to care for the community I serve, I sign as a lie," one person wrote. "We are quietly affirming," said another. Metaphors like "hold my nose" and "cross my fingers" communicate more of the tension here.

Mixed in with those small rebellions are people taking a stronger stand, on both sides. "I will submit to Synod for the sake of my church," one 'Yes' comment said, while a 'No' respondent called "the weaponization of confessions a red line" they will not cross: "I refuse to be bullied."

One thing is clear: anyone taking on the role of Chair in a Christian Reformed Church council next year will need buckets of patience and extraordinary skills of diplomacy, before the first meeting even begins.

Angela Reitsma Bick

Angela, Editor of Christian Courier, *was baptized and married in the Christian Reformed Church.*

ANOMALIES AND FURTHER INSIGHT

WITH THE HELP OF TWO DATA ANALYSTS (thank you Madeleine and Robin!), I looked a little more closely at who answered question 8 about signing the Covenant for Officebearers (CFO) by sorting their responses alongside other questions in the survey. First, it's important to know that 70% of people who filled out *CC*'s survey have been officebearers themselves, and that 40% of survey respondents do not subscribe to *CC*. Question 6 asked how well, on a scale of 1 to 7, local leadership has handled differences in your church. People who said they would not sign the CFO are more likely than the 'Yes' group to have been officebearers before, and were less confident (5-7 on the scale) and more concerned about how leadership is handling differences than people who said 'Yes' to signing the CFO.

There were no significant differences looking at responses sorted by province or by gender. The breakdown between 'Yes,' 'No' and 'Not sure' was similar for every age group – with one notable exception: 25 to 34-year-olds. That group was the only one with a higher 'Yes' than 'No' number, and it had the smallest number of 'Not Sure.'

"I fully agree without reservation with the three forms of unity and recent Synodical clarity on the issue of homosexuality," said one person between the ages of 25 to 34 who responded 'Yes' to signing the CFO. "I have four kids (so far) I want to raise in the historic Chrisitian faith," another wrote. "There are so many other 20- and 30-somethings that want the same! If the church won't teach our kids a Christian sexual ethic, the world will!"